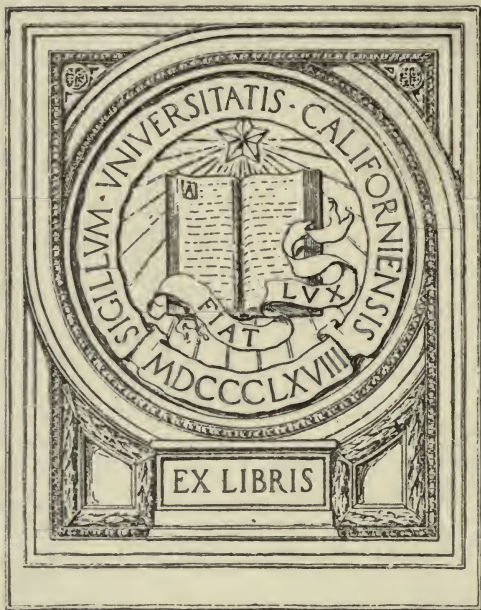


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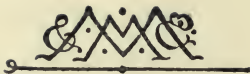
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**KRINDLESYKE**



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# KRINDLESYKE

BY WILFRID GIBSON



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## NOTE

ON the occasion of an obscure dramatic presentation, an early and rudimentary draft of Book I. was published in 1910. It has since been entirely re-written. Book II., written 1919-22, has not been printed hitherto. Though the work was not conceived with a view to stage-production, the author reserves the acting rights.

It may be added that, while "Krindlesyke" is not in dialect, it has been flavoured with a sprinkling of local words; but as these are, for the most part, words expressive of emotion, rather than words conveying information, the sense of them should be easily gathered even by the south-country reader.

W. G.



## PRELUDE

FOUR bleak stone walls, an eaveless, bleak stone roof,  
Like a squared block of native crag, it stands,  
Hunched, on skirlnaked, windy fells, aloof :  
Yet, was it built by patient human hands :  
Hands, that have long been dust, chiselled each stone,  
And bedded it secure ; and from the square  
Squat chimneystack, hither and thither blown,  
The reek of human fires still floats in air,  
And perishes, as life on life burns through.  
Squareset and stark to every blast that blows,  
It bears the brunt of time, withstands anew  
Wildfires of tempest and league-scouring snows,  
Dour and unshaken by any mortal doom,  
Timeless, unstirred by any mortal dream :  
And ghosts of reivers gather in the gloom  
About it, muttering, when the lych-owls scream.


**“ From one generation to another.”**



**BOOK I**

**PHŒBE BARRASFORD**





## BOOK I

### PHCEBE BARRASFORD

*Krindlesyke is a remote shepherd's cottage on the North-umbrian fells, at least three miles from any other habitation. It consists of two rooms, a but and a ben. EZRA BARRASFORD, an old herd, blind and decrepit, sits in an armchair in the but, or living-room, near the open door, on a mild afternoon in April. ELIZA BARRASFORD, his wife, is busy, making griddle-cakes over the peat fire.*

ELIZA (*glancing at the wag-at-the-wa'*): It's hard on three o'clock, and they'll be home

Before so very long now.

EZRA : Eh, what's that ?

ELIZA : You're growing duller every day. I said They'd soon be home now.

EZRA : They? And who be they ?

ELIZA : My faith, you've got a memory like a milk-sile! You've not forgotten Jim's away to wed ? You're not that dull.

EZRA : We cannot all be needles :  
And some folk's tongues are sharper than their wits.  
Yet, till thon spirt of hot tar blinded me,  
No chap was cuter in all the countryside,  
Or better at a bargain ; and it took

A nimble tongue to bandy words with mine.  
 You'd got to be up betimes to get round Ezra :  
 And none was a shrewder judge of ewes, or women.  
 My wits just failed me once, the day I married :  
 But, you're an early riser, and your tongue  
 Is always up before you, and with an edge,  
 Unblunted by the dewfall, and as busy  
 As a scythe in the grass at Lammas. So Jim's away  
 To wed, is he, the limb? I thought he'd gone  
 For swedes; though now, I mind some babblement  
 About a wedding: but, nowadays, words tumble  
 Through my old head like turnips through a slicer ;  
 And naught I ken who the bowdykite's to wed—  
 Some bletherskite he's picked up in a ditch,  
 Some fond fligary flirtigig, clarty-fine,  
 Who'll turn a slattern-shrew and a cap-river  
 Within a week, if I ken aught of Jim.  
 Unless . . . Nay, sure, 'twas Judith Ellershaw.

ELIZA : No, no; you're dull, indeed. It's Phœbe  
 Martin.

EZRA : Who's Phœbe Martin? I ken naught of her.

ELIZA : And I, but little.

EZRA : Some trasing tatterwallops,  
 I'll warrant. Well, these days, the lads are like  
 The young cockgrouse, who doesn't consult his dad  
 Before he mates. In my—yet, come to think,  
 I didn't say overmuch. My dad and mammy  
 Scarce kened her name when I sprung my bride on  
 them ;

Just loosed on them a gisseypig out of a poke  
 They'd heard no squeak of. They'd to thole my choice,



I spared her all I could. Ay, that was it :  
 She couldn't abide to watch me trying to spare her,  
 Another woman doing her work, fnoodling  
 At jobs she'd do so smartly, tidying her hearth,  
 Using her oven, washing her cups and saucers,  
 Scouring her tables, redding up her rooms,  
 Handling her treasures, and wearing out her gear.  
 And now, another, wringing out my dishclout,  
 And going about my jobs in her own fashion ;  
 Turning my household, likely, howthery-towthery,  
 While I sit mum. But it takes forty years'  
 Steady east wind to teach some folk ; and then  
 They're overdried to profit by their learning.  
 And so, without a complaint, and keeping her secrets,  
 Your mother died with patient, quizzical eyes,  
 Half-pitying, fixed on mine ; and dying, left  
 Krindlesyke and its gear to its new mistress.

EZRA : A woman, she was. You've never had her  
 hand

At farls and bannocks ; and her singing-hinnies  
 Fair melted in the mouth—not sad and soggy  
 As yours are like to be. She'd no habnab  
 And hitty-missy ways ; and she'd turn to,  
 At shearing-time, and clip with any man.  
 She never spared herself.

ELIZA : And died at forty,  
 As white and worn as an old table-cloth,  
 Darned, washed, and ironed to a shred of cobweb,  
 Past mending ; while your father was sixty-nine  
 Before he could finish himself, soak as he might.

EZRA : Don't you abuse my father. A man, he was—









You must have brooded, old clocker.

ELIZA : True enough,  
 Marriage means little more than a new gown  
 To some : but Phœbe's not a fancicle tauntril,  
 With fingers itching to hansel new-fangled flerds.  
 Why she'd wed . . .

EZRA : Tuts ! Girls take their chance. And you'd  
 Conceit enough of Jim, at one time—proud  
 As a pipit that's hatched a cuckoo : and if the gowk  
 Were half as handsome as I—you ken, yourself,  
 You needed no coaxing : I wasted little breath  
 Whistling to heel : you came at the first "Isca !"

ELIZA : Who kens what a lass runs away from, crazed  
 to quit  
 Home, at all hazards, little realizing  
 It's life, itself, she's trying to escape ;  
 And plodging deeper.

EZRA : Trust a wench for kenning.  
 I've to meet the wife who'd be a maid again :  
 Once in the fire, no wife, though she may crackle  
 On the live coals, leaps back to the frying-pan.  
 It's against nature.

ELIZA : Maybe : and yet, somehow,  
 Phœbe seemed different.

EZRA : I've found little difference  
 Betwixt one gimmer and another gimmer,  
 When the ram's among them. But, where does she  
 hail from ?

ELIZA : Allendale way. Jim met her at Martinmas  
 fair.

EZRA : We met . . .



But I could size a wench up, at a glance ;  
And Judith . . .

ELIZA :                    Ay : but Krindlesyke would be  
A muckheap-lie-on, with that cloffy slut  
For mistress. But she flitted one fine night.

EZRA : Rarely the shots of the flock turn lowpy-dyke ;  
Likelier the tops have the spunk to run ramrace ;  
And I think no worse . . .

ELIZA :                    Her father turned her out,  
'Twas whispered ; and he's never named her, since :  
And no one's heard a word. I couldn't thole  
The lass. She'd big cow-eyes : there's little good  
In that sort. Jim's well shot of her ; he'll not  
Hear tell of her : that sort can always find  
Another man to fool : they don't come back :  
Past's past, with them.

EZRA :                    I liked . . .

ELIZA :                    Ay, you're Jim's dad.  
But now he's settling down, happen I'll see  
Bairn's bairns at Krindlesyke, before I die.  
Six sons—and only the youngest of the bunch  
Left in the old home to do his parents credit.

EZRA : Queer, all went wild, your sons, like collies  
bitten  
With a taste for mutton bleeding-hot. Cold lead  
Cures dogs of that kidney, peppering them one fine night  
From a chink in a stell ; but, when they're two-legged  
curs,  
They've a longer run ; and, in the end, the gallows  
Don't noose them, kicking and squealing like snarled  
rabbits,

Dead-certain, as 'twould do in the good old days.

ELIZA : You crack your gallows-jokes on your own  
sons—

And each the spit of the father that drove them wild,  
With cockering them and cursing them ; one moment,  
Fooling them to their bent, the moment after,  
Flogging them senseless, till their little bodies  
Were one blue bruise.

EZRA : I never larruped enough,  
But let the varmint's off too easily :  
That was the mischief. They should have had my  
dad—

An arm like a bullock-walloper, and a fist  
Could fell a stot ; and faiks, but he welted me  
Skirlnaked, yarked my hurdies till I yollered,  
In season and out, and made me the man I am.  
Ay, he'd have garred the young eels squirm.

ELIZA : And yet,  
My sons, as well : though I lost my hold of each  
Almost before he was off my lap, with you  
To egg them on against me. Peter went first :  
And Jim's the lave. But he may settle down.  
God kens where you'd be, if you'd not wed young.

EZRA : And the devil where you'd be, if we hadn't  
met  
That hiring-day at Hexham, on the minute.  
I'd spent last hiring with another wench,  
A giggling red-haired besom ; and we were trysted  
To meet at the Shambles : and I was awaiting her,  
When I caught the glisk of your eye : but she was  
late ;

And you were a sony lassie, fresh and pink ;  
 Though little pink about you now, I'd fancy.

ELIZA : Nay, forty-year of Krindlesyke, and all !

EZRA : Young carroty-pow must have been in a fine  
 fantigue,

When she found I'd mizzled. Yet, if she'd turned up  
 In time, poor mealy-face, for all your roses,  
 You'd never have clapped eyes on Krindlesyke :  
 This countryside and you would still be strangers.

ELIZA : In time !

EZRA : A narrow squeak.

ELIZA : If she'd turned up,  
 The red-haired girl had lived at Krindlesyke,  
 Instead of me, this forty-year : and I—  
 I might . . . But we must dree our weird. And yet,  
 To think what my life might have been, if only—  
 The difference !

EZRA : Ay, and hers, "if ifs and ans !"  
 But I'm none certain she'd have seen it, either.  
 I could have had her without wedding her,  
 And no mistake, the nickering, red-haired baggage.  
 Though she was merry, she'd big rabbit-teeth,  
 Might prove gey ill to live with ; ay, and a swarm  
 Of little sandy moppies like their doe,  
 Buck-teeth and freckled noses and saucer-eyes,  
 Gaping and squealing round the table at dinner,  
 And calling me their dad, as likely as not :  
 Though little her mug would matter, now I'm blind ;  
 And by this there'll scarce be a stump in her yellow  
 gums,  
 And not a red hair to her nodding poll—











To welcome Jim and Phœbe as man and wife.  
Come!

EZRA : Are the curlew calling?

ELIZA : Calling? Ay!

And they've been at it all the blessed day,  
As on the day I came to Krindlesyke.  
Likely the new bride—though 'twasn't at the time  
I noticed them: too heedless and new-fangled.  
She may be different: she may hear them now:  
They're noisy enough.

EZRA : I cannot catch a note:  
I'm getting old, and deaved as well as darkened.  
When I was young, I liked to hear the whaups  
Calling to one another down the slacks:  
And I could whistle, too, like any curlew.  
'Twas an ancient bird wouldn't answer my call: and  
now

I'm ancient myself—an old, blind, doddering heron,  
Dozing his day out in a syke, while minnows  
Play tiggy round his shanks and nibble his toes;  
And the hawk hangs overhead. But then the blood  
Was hot, and I'd a relish—such a relish!  
Keen as a kestrel . . . and now . . .

ELIZA : It's Jim and Phœbe—  
The music and the dazzle in their heads:  
And they'll be here . . .

EZRA : I wish he'd married Judith:  
She's none the worse for being a ruddled ewe.

ELIZA : Nay, God forbid! At least, I'm spared that  
bildert.

(*Ezra rises ; and ELIZA carries out his chair, and he hobbles after her. She soon returns, and puts griddle-cakes into the oven to keep hot. Presently a step is heard on the threshold, and JUDITH ELLERSHAW stands in the doorway, a baby in her arms. ELIZA does not notice her for a few moments ; then, glancing up, recognizes her with a start.*)

ELIZA : You, Judith Ellershaw ! I thought 'twas Jim.

JUDITH : You thought 'twas Jim ?

ELIZA : Jim and . . . To think it's you !

Where've you sprung from ? It's long since you've shown face

In these parts ; and we'd seen the last of you, I reckoned, little dreaming—and, least of all, To-day !

JUDITH : And should I be more welcome, then, On any other ?

ELIZA : Welcome ? I hardly know. Decent folk don't keep open house for your sort At any time. Your foot's not dirtied that doorstone A dozen times in your life : and then, to come, To-day, of all days, just when Jim . . .

*(Breaks off abruptly.)*

JUDITH : When Jim ?

ELIZA : But, don't stand there. You're looking pale and peaked.

It's heavy, traiking the fell-tracks with a baby : Come in, and rest a moment, if you're tired.

You cannot bide here long : I'm sorry, lass ;  
 But I'm expecting company ; and you  
 Yourself, I take it, won't be over-eager  
 For company.

JUDITH : I'm tired enough, God kens—  
 Bone-weary : but we'll not stay long, to shame you :  
 And you can send us packing in good time,  
 Before your company comes.

*(She enters, and seats herself on a chair near the door. ELIZA busies herself, laying the table for tea, and there is silence for a while.)*

JUDITH : And so, Jim's gone  
 To fetch the company ?

ELIZA : Ay, Jim has gone . . .

*(She breaks off again abruptly, and says no more for a while. Presently she goes to the oven, takes out a griddle-cake, splits and butters it, and hands it to JUDITH.)*

ELIZA : Likely, you're hungry, and could do with  
 a bite ?

JUDITH (*taking it*): I'm famished. Cake ! We're  
 grand, to-day, indeed !

And scones and bannocks—carties, quite a spread !  
 It's almost like a wedding.

ELIZA : A wedding, woman ?  
 Can't folk have scones and bannocks and singing-  
 hinnies,

But you must prate of weddings—you, and all !

JUDITH : I meant no harm. I thought, perhaps, Jim  
 might . . .

'Though, doubtless, he was married long ago ?

(ELIZA does not answer. JUDITH'S baby begins to whimper, and she tries to hush it in an absent manner.)

JUDITH: Whisht, whisht! my little lass! You mustn't cry,

And shame the ears of decent folk. Whisht, whisht!

ELIZA: Why, that's no way to hush the teelytoon. Come, give the bairn to me. Come, woman, come!

(Taking the child from JUDITH.)

I'll show you how to handle babies. There!

JUDITH: And you would nurse my brat?

ELIZA: A bairn's a bairn—

Ay, even though its mother . . .

(Breaks off abruptly, and stands, gazing before her, clasping the baby to her bosom.)

JUDITH: Why don't you finish?

“Ay, even though its mother . . .” you were saying.

ELIZA: It's ill work, calling names.

JUDITH: You needn't fear

To make me blush by calling me any name

That hasn't stung me to the quick already.

My pious father had a holy tongue;

And he had searched the Scriptures to some purpose.

ELIZA (gazing before her in an abstracted manner):

Ay: likely enough. . . . Poor bairn, poor little bairn—

It's strange, but, as you snuggled to my breast,

I could have fancied, a moment, 'twas Jim I held

In my arms again. I'm growing old and foolish,

To have such fancies.





ELIZA : Daughter,  
I'll tell you all. You'll never have the heart . . .

JUDITH : The heart !

ELIZA : To stay and shame us, when  
you ken all.

JUDITH : All ?

ELIZA : When you talked of weddings, you'd  
hit the truth :

And Jim brings home his bride to-day. Even now . . .

JUDITH : And Jim brings home . . .

ELIZA : I looked for them by this :  
But you've still time . . .

JUDITH : The bride comes home to-day.  
Brides should come home : it's right a man should  
bring

His bride home—ay ! And we must go, my wean,  
To spare her blushes. We're no company  
For bride and bridegroom. Happen, we should meet  
them,

You must not cry to him : I must not lift  
My eyes to his. We're nothing now to him.  
Your cry might tell her heart too much : my eyes  
Might meet her eyes, and tell . . . It isn't good  
For a bride to know too much. So, we must hide  
In the ditch, as they pass by, if we should chance  
To meet them on the road—their road and ours—  
The same road, though we're travelling different ways.  
The bride comes home. Brides come home every day.  
And you and I . . .

ELIZA : There's nothing else for it.

JUDITH : There's nothing else ?

ELIZA : Nay, lass ! How  
could you bide ?  
They'll soon . . . But, you'll not meet them, if you  
go . . .

JUDITH : Go, where ?

ELIZA : And how should I ken where  
you're bound for ?  
I thought you might be making home.

JUDITH : Home—home !  
I might be making home ? And where's my home—  
Ay, and my bairn's home, if it be not here ?

ELIZA : Here ? You'd not stay ?

JUDITH : Why not ? Have  
I no right ?

ELIZA : If you'll not go for my sake, go for Jim's.  
If you were fond . . .

JUDITH : And, think you, I'd be here,  
If I had not been fond of Jim ? And yet,  
Why should I spare him ? He's not spared me much,  
Who gave him all a woman has to give.

ELIZA : But, think of her, the bride, and her home-  
coming.

JUDITH : I'll go.

ELIZA : You lose but little : too well I ken  
How little—I, who've dwelt this forty-year  
At Krindlesyke.

JUDITH : Happen you never loved.

ELIZA : I, too, was young, once, daughter.

JUDITH : Ay : and yet,  
You've never tramped the road I've had to travel.  
God send it stretch not forty-year !

ELIZA : I've come  
That forty-year. We're out on the selfsame road,  
The three of us: but, she's the stoniest bit  
To travel still—the bride just setting out,  
And stepping daintily down the lilylea.  
We've known the worst.

JUDITH : But, she can keep the highway,  
While I must slink in the ditch, among the nettles.

ELIZA : I've kept the hard road, daughter, forty-year :  
The ditch may be easier going, after all :  
Nettles don't sting each other.

JUDITH : Nay: but I'm not  
A ditch-born nettle, but, among the nettles,  
Only a woman, naked to every sting :  
And there are slugs and slithery toads and paddocks  
In the ditch-bottom; and their slimy touch  
Is worse to bear than any nettle . . .

ELIZA : Ay—  
The pity of it! A maid blooms only once :  
And then, that a man should ruin . . . But, you've  
your bairn :  
And bairns, while we can hold them safe in our arms,  
And they still need the breast, make up for much :  
For there's a kind of comfort in their clinging,  
Though they only cling till they can stand alone.  
But yours is not a son. If I'd only had  
One daughter . . .

JUDITH : Well, you'll have a daughter now.  
But we must go our way to—God kens where !  
Before Jim brings the bride home. You've your wish :  
Jim brings you home a daughter . . .



*(As she speaks, a step is heard, and EZRA BARRASFORD appears in the doorway. Turning to go, JUDITH meets him. She tries to pass him, but he clutches her arm; and she stands, dazed, while his fingers grope over her.)*

EZRA :

So Jim's back :

And has slipped by his old dad without a word ?  
 I caught no footfall, though once I'd hear an adder  
 Slink through the bent. I'm deafer than an adder—  
 Deaf as the stone-wall Johnny Looney built  
 Around the frog that worried him with croaking.  
 I couldn't hear the curlew—not a note.  
 But I forget my manners. Jim, you dog,  
 To go and wed, and never tell your dad !  
 I thought 'twas swedes you were after : and, by gox !  
 It's safer fetching turnips than a wife.  
 But, welcome home ! Is this the bonnie bride ?  
 You're welcome, daughter, home to Krindlesyke.

*(Feeling her face.)*

But, wife, it's Judith, after all ! I kened  
 That Judith was the lucky lass. You said  
 'Twas somebody else : I cannot mind the name—  
 Some fly-by-the-sky, outlandish name : but I  
 Was right, you see. Though I be blind and deaf,  
 I'm not so dull as some folk think. There's others  
 Are getting on in years, forby old Ezra.  
 Though some have ears to hear the churchyard worms  
 Stirring beneath the mould, and think it time  
 That he was straked and chested, the old dobbey  
 Is not a corpse yet : and it well may happen

He'll not be the first at Krindlesyke to lie,  
 Cold as a slug, with pennies on his eyes.  
 Aiblains, the old ram's cassen, but he's no trake yet :  
 And, at the worst, he'll be no braxy carcass  
 When he's cold mutton. Ay, I'm losing grip ;  
 But I've still got a kind of hold on life ;  
 And a young wench in the house makes all the differ-  
 ence.

We've hardly blown the froth off, and smacked our lips,  
 Before we've reached the bottom of the pot :  
 Yet the last may prove the tastiest drop, who kens ?  
 You're welcome, daughter.

*(His hand, travelling over her shoulder, touches  
 the child.)*

Ah, a brat—Jim's bairn !

He hasn't lost much time, has Jim, the dog !  
 Come, let me take it, daughter. I've never held  
 A grandchild in my arms. Six sons I've had,  
 But not one's made me granddad, to my knowledge :  
 And all the hoggerels have turned lowpy-dyke,  
 And scrambled, follow-my-leader, over the crag's edge,  
 But Jim, your husband : and not for me to say,  
 Before his wife, that he's the draft of the flock.  
 Give me the baby : I'll not let it fall :  
 I've always had a way with bairns, and women.  
 It's not for naught I've tended ewes and lambs,  
 This sixty-year.

*(He snatches the baby from JUDITH, before she  
 realizes what he is doing, and hobbles away  
 with it to the high-backed settle by the fire,  
 out of sight. Before JUDITH can move to  
 follow him, steps are heard on the threshold.)*

ELIZA :                    Ah, God : they're at the door !

*As she speaks, JIM and PHOEBE BARRASFORD enter, talking and laughing. JUDITH ELLERSHAW shrinks into the shadow behind the door, while they come between her and the settle on which EZRA is nursing the baby unseen. ELIZA stands dazed in the middle of the room.*

JIM : And they lived happy ever afterwards,  
Eh, lass ? Well, mother : I've done the trick : all's  
over ;

And I'm a married man, copt fair and square,  
Coupled to Phœbe : and I've brought her home.  
You call the lass to mind, though you look moidart ?  
What's dozzened you ? She'll find her wits soon,  
Phœbe :

They're in a mullock, all turned howthery-towthery  
At the notion of a new mistress at Krindlesyke—  
She'll come to her senses soon, and bid you welcome.  
Take off your bonnet ; and make yourself at home.  
I trust tea's ready, mother : I'm fairly famished.  
I've hardly had a bite, and not a sup  
To wet my whistle since forenoon : and dod !  
But getting married is gey hungry work.  
I'm hollow as a kex in a ditch-bottom :  
And just as dry as Molly Miller's milkpail  
She bought, on the chance of borrowing a cow.  
Eh, Phœbe, lass ! But you've stopped laughing, have  
you ?

And you look fleyed : there's nothing here to scare you :  
We're quiet folk at Krindlesyke. Come, mother,  
Have you no word of welcome for the lass,

That you gape like a foundered ewe at us? What ghost

Has given you a gliff, and set you chittering?  
Come, shake yourself, before I rax your bones;  
And give my bride the welcome due to her—  
My bride, the lady I have made my wife.  
Poor lass, she's quaking like a dothery-dick.

ELIZA (to PHŒBE): Daughter, may you . . .

EZRA (*crooning, unseen, to the baby*):

“Dance for your mammy,  
Dance for your daddy . . .”

JIM: What ails the old runt now?  
You musn't heed him, Phœbe, lass: he's blind  
And old and watty: but there's no harm in him.

(*Goes towards settle.*)

Come, dad, and jog your wits, and stir your stumps,  
And welcome . . . What the devil's this? Whose  
brat . . .

EZRA: Whose brat? And who should ken—although  
they say,

It's a wise father knows his own child. Ay!  
If he's the devil, you're the devil's brat,  
And I'm the devil's daddy. Happen you came  
Before the parson had time to read the prayers.  
But, he's a rum dad . . .

(JUDITH ELLERSHAW *steps forward to take the  
child from EZRA.*)

JIM: Judith Ellershaw!

Why, lass, where ever have . . .

(*He steps towards her, then stops in confusion.  
Nobody speaks as JUDITH goes towards the*





JUDITH:                    You've no right to ask.

PHŒBE: Maybe: and yet, you shall not cross that  
doorsill,

Until I know.

JUDITH:            Come, woman, don't be foolish.

PHŒBE: You say I've no right. Pray God, you  
speak the truth:

But there may be no woman in the world  
Who has a better right.

JUDITH:            You'd never heed  
A doting dobbie's blethering, would you, lass—  
An old, blind, crazy creature . . .

PHŒBE:                                    If I've no right,  
You'll surely never have the heart to keep  
The name from me? You'll set my mind at ease?

JUDITH: 'The heart! If it will set your mind at ease,  
I'll speak my shame . . . I'll speak my shame right  
out . . .

I'll speak my shame right out, before you all.

JIM: But, lass!

ELIZA (*to PHŒBE*): Nay: let her go. You're young  
and hard:

And I was hard, though far from young: I've long  
Been growing old; though little I realized  
How old. And when you're old, you don't judge  
hardly:

You ken things happen, in spite of us, willy-nilly.  
We think we're safe, holding the reins; and then  
In a flash the mare bolts; and the wheels fly off;  
And we're lying, stunned, beneath the broken cart.  
So, let the lass go quietly; and keep

Your happiness. When you're old, you'll not let slip  
 A chance of happiness so easily :  
 There's not so much of it going, to pick and choose :  
 The apple's speckled ; but it's best to munch it,  
 And get what relish out of it you can ;  
 And, one day, you'll be glad to chew the core :  
 For all its bitterness, few chuck it from them,  
 While they've a sense left that can savour aught.  
 So, let the lass go. You may have the right  
 To question her : but folk who stand on their rights  
 Get little rest : they're on a quaking moss  
 Without a foothold ; and find themselves to the neck  
 In Deadman's Flow, before they've floundered far.  
 Rights go for little, in this life : few are worth  
 The risk of losing peace and quiet. You'll have  
 Plenty to worrit, and keep you wakeful, without  
 A pillow stuffed with burrs and briars : so, take  
 An old wife's counsel, daughter : let well alone ;  
 And don't go gathering grievances. The lass . . .

JIM : Ay, don't be hard on her. Though mother's  
 old,

She talks sense, whiles. So let the poor lass go.

JUDITH : The father of my bairn . . .

JIM : She's lying, Phœbe !

JUDITH : The father of my bairn is—William Burn—  
 A stranger to these parts. Now, let me pass.

*(She tries to slip by, but PHOEBE still does not make  
 way for her.)*

JIM : Ay, Phœbe, let her go. She tells the truth.  
 I thought . . . But I mistook her. Let her go.  
 I never reckoned you'd be a reesty nag :

Yet, you can set your hoofs, and champ your bit  
 With any mare, I see. I doubt you'll prove  
 A rackle ramstam wife, if you've your head.  
 She's answered what you asked; though, why, un-  
 less . . .

Well, I don't blame the wench: she should ken best.

PHŒBE: Judith, you lie.

JUDITH: I lie! You mean . . .

PHŒBE: To-day,  
 I married your bairn's father.

ELIZA: O God!

JIM: Come, lass,  
 I say!

JUDITH: No woman, no! I spoke the truth.  
 Haven't I shamed myself enough already—  
 That you must call me liar! (*To ELIZA*) Speak out now,  
 If you're not tongue-tied: tell her all you ken—  
 How I'm a byword among honest women,  
 And yet, no liar. You'd tongue enough just now  
 To tell me what I was—a cruel tongue  
 Cracking about my ears: and have you none  
 To answer your son's wife, and save the lad  
 From scandal?

ELIZA: I've not known the lass to lie . . .  
 And she's the true heart, Phœbe, true as death,  
 Whatever it may seem.

JIM: That's that: and so . . .

*(While they have been talking, EZRA has risen  
 from the settle, unnoticed; and has hobbled to  
 where PHŒBE and JUDITH confront one another.  
 He suddenly touches PHŒBE'S arm.)*





But, something's happening that a blind man's sense  
 Cannot take hold of ; so, I'd best be quiet—  
 Ay, just sit still all day, and nod and nod,  
 Until I nod myself into my coffin :  
 That's all that's left me.

JUDITH (to PHOEBE) : You'd weigh an old man's gossip  
 Against my word? O woman, pay no heed  
 To idle tongues, if you'd keep happiness.

PHOEBE : While the tongue lies, the eyes speak out  
 the truth.

JUDITH : The eyes? Then you'll not take my word  
 for it,

But let a dotard's clatterjaw destroy you?  
 You ken my worth : yet, if you care for Jim,  
 You'll trust his oath. If he denies the bairn,  
 Then, you'll believe? You'd surely never doubt  
 Your husband's word, and on your wedding-day?  
 Small wonder you'd be duberous of mine.  
 But Jim's not my sort ; he's an honest lad ;  
 And he'll speak truly. If he denies the bairn . . .

PHOEBE : I've not been used to doubting people's word.  
 My father's daughter couldn't but be trustful  
 Of what men said ; for he was truth itself.  
 If only he'd lived, I mightn't . . .

JUDITH : If Jim denies . . .

PHOEBE : If Jim can look me in the eyes, and swear . . .

JUDITH : Come, set her mind at ease. Don't spare  
 me, Jim ;

But look her in the eyes, and tell her all ;  
 For she's your wife ; and has a right to ken  
 The bairn's no bairn of yours. Come, lad, speak out ;





At Krindlesyke. I'm ravenous as a squab,  
 When someone's potted dad and mammy crow.  
 So sit down, Phœbe, before I clear the board.

PHŒBE: Judith, it's time we were getting home.

JUDITH: Home, lass?

I've got no home: I've long been homeless: I . . .

PHŒBE: That much he told me about you: he spoke  
 the truth

So far, at least: but I have still a home,  
 My mother will be glad to see me back—  
 Ay, more than glad: she was loth to let me go;  
 Though, trusting Jim, as she trusted everyone,  
 She said but little: and she'll welcome you,  
 If only for your baby's sake. She's just  
 A child, with children. Unless you are too proud . . .  
 Nay! But I see you'll come. We'll live and work,  
 And tend the bairn, as sisters, we who care.  
 Come, Judith.

*(She throws the door wide and goes out, without  
 looking back. JIM steps forward to stay her,  
 but halts, bewildered, on the threshold, and  
 stands gazing after her.)*

JIM: I'm damned! Nay, lass, I bid you bide:  
 I'd see you straked, before I'd let you go . . .  
 Do you hear, I bid . . . The blasted wench, she's gone—  
 Gone! I've a mind . . . If I don't hang for her . . .  
 Just let me get my fingers . . . But, I'm betwattled  
 Like a stoorded tup! And this is my wedding-day!

*(He stands speechless; but at length turns to  
 JUDITH, who is gazing after PHŒBE with an  
 unrealizing stare.)*



JIM: Well . . . anyway, you'll not desert me,  
Judith.

Old friends are best : and I—I always liked you.  
The other lass was a lamb to woo, but wed,  
A termagant : and I'm well shot of her.  
I'd have wrung the pullet's neck for her one day,  
If she'd—and the devil to pay ! So it's good  
riddance . . .

Yet, she'd a way with her, she had, the filly !  
And I'd have relished breaking her in. But you  
Were always easy-going, and fond of me—  
Ay, fond and faithful. Look, how you stood up  
To her, the tawpy tauntril, for my sake !  
We'll let bygones be bygones, won't we, Judith ?  
My chickens have come home to roost, it seems.  
And so, this is my baby ? Who'd have dreamt . . .  
I little looked to harvest my wild oats.

*(JUDITH starts, shrinking from JIM : and then,  
clutching her baby to her bosom, she goes  
quickly out of the door.)*

JUDITH : I'm coming, Phœbe, coming home with you !  
*(JIM stands on the doorstone, staring after her,  
dumbfounded, till she is out of sight ; then  
he turns, and clashes the door to.)*

ELIZA : Ay, but it's time to bar the stable door.

JIM : I've done with women : they're a faithless lot.

EZRA : I can't make head or tail of all the wran-  
gling—

Such a gillaber and gilravishing,  
As I never heard in all my born days, never.  
Weddings were merrymakings in my time :

The reckoning seldom came till the morrow's morn.  
But, Jim, my boy, though you're a baa-waa body,  
And gan about like a goose with a nicked head,  
You've, aiblains, found out now that petticoats  
Are kittle-cattle, the whole rabblement.

The reesty nags will neither heck nor gee :  
And they're all clingclang like the Yetholm tinkers  
Ay : though you're just a splurging jackalally,  
You've spoken truth for once, Jim : womenfolk,  
Wenches and wives, are all just weathercocks.  
I've ever found them faithless, first and last.  
But, where's your daughter, Jim ? I want to hold  
The bairn.

JIM : They've taken even her from me.

(ELIZA, *who has been filling the teapot, takes  
EZRA by the hand, and leads him to his seat  
at the table.*)

ELIZA : Come, husband : sup your tea, before it's  
cold :

And you, too, son. Ay, we're a faithless lot.





**BOOK II**  
**BELL HAGGARD**







Of my body, I reckoned to ken through and through,  
 As every mother thinks she knows her sons,  
 Have been pitch night to me. We never learn.  
 I thought I'd got by heart each turn and twist  
 Of all Jim's stupid cunning: but even he's  
 Outwitted me. Six sons, and not one left;  
 All gone in bitterness—firstborn to reckling:  
 Peter, twelve-year since, that black Christmas Eve:  
 And now Jim ends . . .

EZRA: You mean Jim's gone for good?

ELIZA: For good and all; he's taken Peter's road.

EZRA: And who's to tend the ewes? He couldn't  
 go—

No herd could leave his sheep to an old wife's care:  
 For this old carcass, once counted the best herd's  
 In the countryside, is a useless bag of bones now.  
 Jim couldn't leave . . .

ELIZA: For all I ken or care,  
 He's taken them with him too.

EZRA: You're hivering!  
 Your sons aren't common thieves, I trust. And Jim  
 Would scarce have pluck to sneak a swede from the  
 mulls

Of a hobbled ewe, much less make off with a flock—  
 Though his forbears lifted a when Scots' beasts in  
 their time—

And Steel would have him by the heels before  
 He'd travelled a donkey's gallop, though he skelped  
 along

Like Willie Pigg's dick-ass. But how do you ken  
 The gawky's gone for good? He couldn't leave . . .





ELIZA : Not quite :  
The paper was in.

EZRA : But the money, you dam of thieves—  
Where was the money ?

ELIZA : It wasn't in the box—  
Not a brass farthing.

EZRA : The money gone—all gone ?  
Why didn't you tell me about it right away ?

ELIZA : I wasn't minding money : I'd lost a son.

EZRA : A son—a thief ! I'll have the law of him :  
I'll sprag his wheel : for all his pretty pace,  
He'll come a cropper yet, the scruntly wastrel.  
This comes of marrying into a coper's family :  
I might have kenned : thieving runs in their blood.

ELIZA : I've seen the day that lie'd have roused . . .

But now,

It's not worth while . . . worth while. I've never felt  
Such heat : it smothers me : it's like a nightmare,  
When you wake with your head in the blankets, all  
asweat :

Only, I cannot wake . . . It snowed the night  
That Peter went . . .

EZRA : Blabbering of heat and snow :  
And all that money gone—my hard-earned savings !  
We're beggared, woman—beggared by your son :  
And then, to sit and yammer like a yieldewe :  
Come, stir your stumps ; and clap your bonnet on :  
Up and away !

ELIZA : And where should I away to ?

EZRA : I'll have the law of him : I'll have him gaoled,  
And you must fetch the peeler.



And only women labour : and, when they go,  
 Only the mothers lose them : and all for nothing,  
 The coil and cumber ! If I could have left one son,  
 Wedded, and settled down at Krindlesyke,  
 To do his parents credit, and carry on . . .  
 First Peter came : it snowed the night he came—  
 A feeding-storm of fissing dry snow.  
 I lay and watched flakes fleetering out of the dark  
 In the candleshine against the wet black glass,  
 Like moths about a lanthorn . . . I lay and watched,  
 Till the pains were on me . . . And they buzzed like  
     bees,  
 The snowflakes in my head—hot, stinging bees . . .  
 It snowed again, the night he went. . . . In the smother  
 I lost him, in a drift down Bloodsyeke . . .  
 I couldn't follow further : the snow closed in—  
 Dry flakes that stung my face like swarming bees,  
 And blinded me . . . and buzzing, till my head  
 Was all ahum ; and I was fair betwattled . . .  
 I've not set eyes . . .

EZRA :                      Gather your wits together.

There's no one else ; and you must go to Rawridge—  
 No daundering on the road ; and tell John Steel  
 Jim's gone : and so, there's none to look to the sheep.  
 He must send someone . . . Though my money melt  
 In the hot pocket of a vagabond,  
 They must be minded : sheep can't tend themselves.

ELIZA : I'll go. 'Twas cruel to leave them in this  
     heat,

With none to water them. This heat's a judgment.  
 They were my sons : I bore and suckled them.



With a red-hot prong at his hurdies to prog him on,  
If I'd my way with him : de'il scart the hannel !

*(He sits, brooding: and some time has passed, when the head of a tramp, shaggy and unkempt, is thrust in at the door; and is followed by the body of PETER BARRASFORD, who steps cautiously in, and stealing up to the old man's chair, stands looking down upon him with a grin.)*

EZRA (*stirring uneasily*): A step, for sure ! You're back ? Though how you've travelled so quickly, Eliza, I can't think. And when's John Steel to turn us out, to follow Jim and the other vagabonds ? And who's he sending ? He's not a man to spare . . . But, sheep are sheep : Someone must tend them, though all else go smash. I've given my life to sheep, spent myself for them : And now, I'm not the value of a dead sheep to any farmer—a rackle of bones for the midden ! A bitter day, 'twill be, when I turn my back on Krindlesyke. I little reckoned to go, A blind old cripple, hobbling on two sticks. Pride has a fall, they say : and I was proud—Proud as a thistle ; and a donkey's cropt The thistle's prickly pride. Why don't you speak ? I'm not mistaken this time : I heard you come : I feel you standing over me.

*(He pokes round with his stick, catching PETER on the shin with it.)*

PETER (*wresting the stick from EZRA's grasp*): Easy on ! Peter's no lad to take a leathering, now.



Your time's come round for breeches down, old boy :  
 But don't be scared ; for I'm no walloper—  
 Too like hard work ! My son's a clean white skin :  
 He's never skirled, as you made me. By gox,  
 You gave me gip : my back still bears the stripes  
 Of the loundering I got the night I left.  
 But I bear no malice, you old bag-of-bones :  
 And where's the satisfaction in committing  
 Assault and battery on a blasted scarecrow ?  
 'Twas basting hot young flesh that you enjoyed :  
 I still can hear you smack your lips with relish,  
 To see the blue weals rising, as you laid on,  
 Until the tawse was bloody. Not juice enough  
 In your geyzened carcase to raise one weal : and I never  
 Could bear the sound of cracking bones : and you're  
 All nobs and knuckles, like the parson's pig.  
 To think I feared you once, old spindleshanks !  
 But I'm not here for paying compliments :  
 I've other pressing business on that brings me  
 To the God-forsaken gaol where I was born.  
 If I make sense of your doting, mother's out :  
 And that's as well : it makes things easier.  
 She'd flutter me : and I like to take things easy,  
 Though I'm no sneak : I come in, bold as brass,  
 By the front, when there's no back door. I'll do the  
 trick

While she's gone : and borrow a trifle on account.  
 I trust that cuddy hasn't cropt your cashbox,  
 Before your eldest son has got his portion.

*(He starts to go towards the inner room, but stops  
 half-way as he hears a step on the threshold.)*

PETER : The devil !

BELL HAGGARD, *a tall young tinker-woman, with an orange-coloured kerchief about her head, appears in the doorway with her young son, MICHAEL.*

PETER : You, Bell ? Lass, but you startled me.

EZRA (*muttering to himself*) : This must be death :  
the crows are gathering in.

I don't feel like cold carrion, but corbies will gather,  
And flesh their bloody beaks on an old ram's carcase,  
Before the life's quite out.

PETER (*to BELL*) : I feared 'twas mother.

Lucky, she's out ; it's easier to do—

Well, you ken what, when she's . . . But didn't I bid  
You keep well out of sight, you and the lad ?

BELL : You did. What then ?

PETER : I thought 'twas better  
the bairn . . .

BELL : You think too much for a man with a small  
head :

You'll split the scalp, some day. I've not been used  
To doing any man's bidding, as you should ken :  
And I'd a mind to see the marble halls  
You dreamt you dwelt in.

PETER : Hearken, how she gammons !

BELL : She—the cat's mother ? You've no manners,  
Peter :

You haven't introduced us.

PETER : Only hark !

Well, dad, she's Bell—Bell Haggard, tinker-born—  
She'll tell you she's blood-royal, likely as not—





BELL: Step lively, then. I find this welcome too  
warm

On such a sultry day: I'm choked for air.

These whitewashed walls, they're too like—well, you  
ken

Where you'll find yourself, if you get nobbled . . .

PETER: It seems

There's no one here to nab us; Jim's gone off:

But I'd as lief be through with it, and away,

Before my mother's back.

BELL: You're safe enough:

There's none but sheep in sight for three miles round:

And they're all huddled up against the dykes,

With lollering tongues too baked to bleat "Stop  
thief!"

Look slippy! I'm half-scumfished by these walls—

A weak flame, easily snuffed out: the stink

Of whitewash makes me queasy—sets me listening

To catch the click of the cell-door behind me:

I feel cold bracelets round my wrists, already.

Is thon the strong-room?

PETER: Ay.

BELL: Then sharp's the word:

It's time that we were stepping, Deadwood Dick.

*(As PETER goes into the other room, EZRA tries to  
rise from his chair.)*

EZRA: Help! Murder! Thieves!

BELL *(thrusting him easily back with one hand)*: The  
oracle has spoken.

And so, old image, you've found your tongue at last:

Small wonder you mislaid it, in such a mug.

Help, say you? But, you needn't bleat so loud :  
 There's none within three miles to listen to you,  
 But me and Peter and Michael ; and we're not deaf :  
 So don't go straining your voice, old nightingale,  
 Or splitting your wheezy bellows. And "thieves," no  
 less !

Tastes differ : but it isn't just the word  
 I'd choose for welcoming my son and heir,  
 When he comes home ; and brings with him his—well,  
 His son, and his son's mother, shall we say,  
 So's not to scandalize your innocence ?  
 And, come to think, it's none too nice a word  
 For grandson's ears : and me, his tender mammy,  
 Doing all I can to keep the lamb's heart pure.  
 And as for "murder"—how could there be murder ?  
 Murder's full-blooded—no mean word like "thieves" :  
 And who could murder a bundle of dried peas-sticks ?  
 Flung on the fire, happen they'd crackle and blaze :  
 But I'm hot enough, to-day, without you frizzling.  
 Still, "thieves" sticks in my gullet, old heel-of-the-  
 loaf.

Yet I'm not particular, myself, at times :  
 And I've always gathered from your dutiful son  
 Manners were taken for granted at Krindlesyke,  
 And never missed : so I'll overlook the word.  
 You've not been used to talking with a lady,  
 Old scrag-end : still, I'm truly honoured, sir,  
 In making your acquaintance : for I've heard  
 Some pretty things about you from your son.

(EZRA, *who has shrunk back, gasping, into his  
 chair, suddenly starts chuckling to himself.*)

BELL: You're merry, sir! Will you not share the jest?

Aren't you the sparky blade, the daffing callant,  
Naffing and nickering like a three-year-old?

Come, none-so-pretty, cough the old wheeze up,  
Before it chokes you. Let me clap your back.

You're, surely, never laughing at a lady?

*(Seizing him by the collar, and shaking him.)*

You deafy nut—you gibbet—you rusty corncrake!

Tell me what's kittling you, old skeleton,

Or I'll joggle your bones till they rattle like castanets.

*(Suddenly releasing him.)*

Come, Peter: let's away from this mouldy gaol,

Before old heeltaps takes a fit. Your son

Will be a full-grown shepherd before we leave—

And his old mother, trapped between four walls—

If you don't put a jerk in it.

*(PETER comes slowly from the inner room, empty-handed; and stands, dazed, in the doorway.)*

BELL: Well, fumble-fingers?

What's kept you this half-year? I could have burgled

The Bank of England in the time. What's up?

Have you gone gite, now?

EZRA *(still chuckling)*: Thieves cheated by a thief!

BELL: But, where's the box?

PETER: I didn't see the box.

BELL: You didn't see it?

PETER: No; I didn't see it:

The valance hangs too low.

BELL: And you're too proud—

Too proud a prig to stoop? Did you expect

The box to bounce itself into your arms,  
The moment it heard your step ?

PETER : I dared not stoop :  
For there was someone lying on the bed,  
Asleep, I think.

BELL : You think ?

PETER : I only saw  
A hunched-up shoulder, poking through the curtain.

BELL : A woman ?

PETER : Ay, my mother, or her fetch.  
I couldn't take my eyes from that hunched shoulder—  
It looked so queer—till you called my name.

BELL : You said  
Your mother was out. But, we've no time to potter.  
To think I've borne a son to a calf that's fleyed  
Of a sleeping woman's back—his minney's, and all !  
Collops and chitterlings, if she's asleep,  
The job's the easier done. There's not a woman,  
Or a woman's fetch, would scare me from good gold.  
I'll get the box.

*(She steals softly into the other room, and is gone for some time. The others await her expectantly in silence. Presently she comes out, bareheaded and empty-handed. Without a word, she goes to the window, and pulls down the blind ; then closes the outer door : PETER and MICHAEL watching her in amazement.)*

EZRA : So Jim, the fox, has cheated Peter, the fox—  
And vixen and cub, to boot ! But, he made off  
Only this morning : and the scent's still fresh.  
You'll ken the road he'd take, the fox's track—



A thief to catch a thief! He's lifted all:  
 But, if you cop him, I'll give you half, although  
 'Twill scarcely leave enough to bury us  
 With decency, when we have starved to death,  
 Your mother and I. Run, lad: there's fifty-sovereign!  
 And mind you clout and clapperclaw the cull:  
 Spanghew his jacket, when you've riped his pockets—  
 The scurvy scrunt!

BELL: Silence, old misery:  
 There's a dead woman lying in the house—  
 And you can prate of money!

PETER: Dead!

EZRA: Eliza!

BELL: I found the body, huddled on the bed,  
 Already cold and stiffening.

EZRA: I thought I heard . . .  
 Yet, she set out for Rawridge, to fetch a man . . .  
 I felt her passing, in my very bones.  
 I knew her foot: you cannot hear a step  
 For forty-year, and mistake it, though the spring's  
 Gone out of it, and it's turned to a shuffle, it's still  
 The same footfall. Why didn't she answer me?  
 She chattered enough, before she went—such havers!  
 Words tumbling from her lips in a witless jumble.  
 Contrary, to the last, she wouldn't answer:  
 But crept away, like a wounded pheasant, to die  
 Alone. She's gone before me, after all—  
 And she, so hale; while I was crutched and crippled.  
 I haven't looked on her face for eleven-year:  
 But she was bonnie, when I saw her first,  
 That morning at the fair—so fresh and pink.

BELL: She must have died alone. It's an ill thing  
To die alone, folk say; but I don't know.  
She'd hardly die more lonely than she lived:  
For every woman's lonely in her heart.  
I never looked on a lonelier face.

PETER: Come, Bell:  
We'd best be making tracks: there's nothing here:  
So let's be going.

BELL: Going, Peter, where?

PETER: There's nothing to bide here for: we're too  
late.

Jim's stolen a march on us: there's no loot left.

BELL: And you would leave a woman, lying dead;  
And an old blind cripple who cannot do a hand's-turn,  
With no one to look after them—and they,  
Your father and mother?

PETER: Little enough I owe them:  
What can we do for them, anyway? We can't  
Bring back the dead to life: and, sooner or later,  
Someone will come from Rawridge to see to the sheep:  
And dad won't hurt, meanwhile: he's gey and tough.

BELL: And you would leave your mother, lying dead,  
With none but strangers' hands to lay her out—  
No soul of her kin to tend her at the last?

*(She goes to the dresser and looks in the drawers,  
taking out an apron and tying it round her  
waist.)*

EZRA: I never guessed she'd go, and leave me alone.  
How did she think I could get along without her?  
She kenned I could do nothing for myself:  
And yet she's left me alone, to starve to death—



Just sit in my chair, and starve. It wasn't like her.  
And the breath's scarce out of her body, before the place  
Is overrun with a plague of thieving rats.

They'll eat me out of house and home: my God,  
I've come to this—an old blind crippled dobbie,  
Forsaken of wife and bairns; and left to die—

To be nibbled to death by rats: de'il scart the vermin!

BELL: Time's drawn your teeth, but hasn't dulled  
your tongue's edge.

PETER: Come, woman: what the devil are you up to?  
What's this new game?

BELL: Peter, I'm biding here.

PETER: You're biding here?

BELL: And you are staying, too.

PETER: By crikey, no! You'll not catch me: I  
cannot—

With thon in the other room. I never could bear . . .

BELL: You'll stop, till Michael's old enough to manage  
The sheep without your aid: then you may spurt  
To overtake Jim on the road to the gallows;  
And race, the pair of you, neck and neck, for hell:  
But not till I'm done with you.

PETER: Nay, I'll be jiggered . . .

BELL: Truth slips out.

PETER: I've a mind . . .

BELL: She's gone to earth.

PETER: Just hold your gob, you . . .

BELL: Does the daft beast  
fancy

That just because he's in his own calfyard  
He can turn his horns on me? Michael, my son,

You've got your way : and you're to be a herd.  
You never took to horseflesh like a Haggard :  
Yet your mother must do her best for you. A mattress  
Under a roof ; and sheep to keep you busy—  
That's what you're fashioned for—not bracken-beds  
In fellside ditches underneath the stars ;  
And sharing potluck by the roadside fire.  
Well, every man must follow his own bent,  
Even though some woman's wried to let him do it :  
So, I must bide within this whitewashed gaol,  
For ever scrubbing flagstones, and washing dishes,  
And darning hose, and making meals for men,  
Half-suffocated by the stink of sheep,  
Till you find a lass to your mind ; and set me free  
To take the road again—if I'm not too doddery  
For gallivanting ; as most folk are by the time  
They've done their duty by others. Who'd have dreamt  
I'd make the model mother, after all ?  
It seems as though a woman can't escape,  
Once she has any truck with men. But, carties !  
Something's gone topsy-turvy with creation,  
When the cuckoo's turned domestic, and starts to rear  
The young housesparrow. Granddad, Peter's home  
To mind the sheep : and you'll not be turned out,  
If you behave yourself : and when you're lifted,  
There'll be a grandson still at Krindlesyke :  
For Michael is a Barrasford, blood and bone :  
And till the day he fetches home a bride,  
I'm to be mistress here. But hark, old bones,  
You've got to mend your manners : for I'm used  
To having my own way.

PETER : By gox, she is !

BELL : And there's not room for two such in one house.  
Where I am mistress, there can be no master :  
So, don't try on your pretty tricks with me.  
I've always taken the whiphand with men.

PETER : You'll smart yet, dad.

BELL : You go about your  
business,  
Before your feet get frozen to the flagstones :  
Winter's but six months off, you ken. It's time  
You were watering those sheep, before their tongues  
Are baked as black as your heart. You'd better take  
The lad along with you : he cannot learn  
The job too soon ; so I'll get shot of the sight  
Of your mug, and have one lout the less to do for.  
Come, frisk your feet, the pair of you ; and go :  
I've that to do which I must do alone.

*(As soon as PETER and MICHAEL are gone, BELL  
fills a basin with water from a bucket, and  
carries it into the other room, shutting the  
door behind her.)*

EZRA : To think she should go first, when I have had  
One foot in the grave for hard on eleven-year !  
I little looked to taste her funeral ham.

## PART II

*An October afternoon, fifteen years later. There is no one in the room : and the door stands open, showing a wide expanse of fell, golden in the low sunshine. A figure is seen approaching along the cart-track : and JUDITH ELLERSHAW, neatly dressed in black, appears at the door ; and stands, undecided, on the threshold. She knocks several times, but no one answers : so she steps in, and seats herself on a chair near the door. Presently a sound of singing is heard without : and BELL HAGGARD is seen, coming over the bent, an orange-coloured kerchief about her head, her skirt kilted to the knee, and her arms full of withered bracken. She enters, humming : but stops, with a start, on seeing JUDITH ; drops the bracken ; whips off her kerchief ; and lets down her skirt ; and so appears as an ordinary cottage-wife.*

JUDITH : You're Mistress Barrasford ?

BELL : Ay ; so they call me.

JUDITH : I knocked ; but no one answered ; so, I've taken

The liberty of stepping in to rest.

I'm Judith Ellershaw.

BELL: I've heard the name ;  
But can't just mind . . . Ay! You're the hard-  
mouthed wench

That took the bit in her teeth, and bolted : although  
You scarcely look it, either. Old Ezra used  
To mumble your name, when he was raiming on  
About the sovereigns Jim made off with : he missed  
The money more than the son—small blame to him :  
Though why grudge travelling-expenses to good-  
riddance ?

And still, 'twas shabby to pinch the lot : a case  
Of pot and kettle, but I'd have scorned to bag  
The lot, and leave the old folk penniless.  
'Twas hundreds Peter blabbed of—said our share  
Wouldn't be missed—or I'd have never set foot  
In Krindlesyke ; to think I walked into this trap  
For fifty-pound, that wasn't even here !  
I might have kenned—Peter never told the truth,  
Except by accident. I did . . . and yet,  
I came. I had to come : the old witch drew me.  
But, Jim was greedy . . .

JUDITH: Doesn't Jim live here, now ?

BELL: You're not sent back by the penitent, then, to  
pay

The interest on the loan he took that morning  
In an absent-minded fit—and pretty tales  
Are tarradiddles ? Jim's not mucked that step  
In my time : Ezra thought he'd followed you,

JUDITH: Me ?

BELL: You're Jim's wife—though you've not taken  
his name—













Before they'd travelled the twelve-mile to the church-  
yard :

And the hole they'd howked for him, chockful of  
slush :

And the coffin slipt with a splash into the sluther.

Ay—we see life at Krindlesyke, God help us !

JUDITH : A fearsome end.

BELL : Little to choose, 'twixt  
ends.

So, Michael's granddad, and your girl's, went home  
To his forefathers, and theirs—both Barrasfords :  
Though I'd guess your bairn's a gentler strain : yet  
mine's

No streak of me. All Barrasford, I judged him :  
But, though he's Ezra's stubbornness, he's naught  
Of foxy Peter : and grows more like Eliza,  
I'd fancy : though I never kenned her, living :  
I only saw her, dead.

JUDITH : Eliza, too ?

BELL : I was the first to look on her dead face,  
The morn I came : if she'd but lived a day—  
Just one day longer, she'd have let me go.  
No living woman could have held me here :  
But she was dead ; and so, I had to stay—  
A fly, caught in the web of a dead spider.  
It must be her he favours : and he's got  
A dogged patience well-nigh crazes me :  
A husband, born, as I was never born  
For wife. But, happen, you ken him, well as I,  
Leastways, his company-side, since he does business  
At Bellingham ? A happy ending, eh !

For our mischances, they should make a match :  
 Though naught that ever happens is an ending ;  
 A wedding, least of all.

JUDITH :                                   I've never seen him.  
 Ruth keeps her counsel. I'd not even heard  
 His name, till late last night ; and then by chance :  
 But, I've not slept a wink since, you may guess.  
 When I heard " Barrasford of Krindlesyke,"  
 My heart went cold within me, thinking of Jim,  
 And what he'd been to me. I'd had no news  
 Of all that's happened since I left the day  
 Jim wedded ; and . . .

BELL :                                   The nowt felt like a poacher,  
 When keeper's sneaked his bunny, and broken his  
                   snare ?

JUDITH : I fancied he, perhaps . . .

BELL :                                   Ay, likely enough.  
 Jim's wasted a sight of matches, since that day  
 He burnt his fingers so badly ; but he's not kindled  
 A hearthfire yet at Krindlesyke. Anyway,  
 For Michael to be his son, I'd need to be  
 Even an older flame of his than you :  
 For Michael's twenty-one.

JUDITH :                                   As old as that ?  
 But I could never rest, till I'd made sure.  
 Knowing myself, I did not question Ruth . . .

BELL : What's worth the kenning's seldom learned  
                   by speiring.

JUDITH : Though, knowing myself, I dreaded what  
                   might chance,  
 What might already . . .





In bottomless mosshags, where no heat can touch it,  
Till the whole world grills, at last, on hell's gridiron.

JUDITH: Nothing you ken of broken hearts, or  
hell,

To talk so lightly. I have come through hell :  
But you have never loved. What's given in love,  
Is given. It's something to have loved, at least :  
And I have Ruth.

BELL : Ay, the green bracken-shoots,  
Soon push through the black litter of charred heath :  
And you have Ruth.

JUDITH : Or, had her, till last night :  
I've lost her, now, it seems.

BELL : You let life hurt you :  
You shy at shadows ; and shrink from the crack of the  
whip,  
Before the lash stings : and life loves no sport  
Like yarking a shivering hide : you ask for it.

JUDITH : I've been through much.

BELL : And so, you should  
ken better  
Than to hang yourself, before the judge gives sen-  
tence :

His honour can put the black cap on for himself,  
Without your aid. You'll die a thousand deaths,  
Before your end comes, peacefully in bed.

Why should you go half-way to meet your funeral ?

JUDITH : Though there's a joy in giving recklessly,  
In flinging all your faggots on the blaze,  
In losing all for love—a crazy joy  
Long years of suffering cannot quench, I'd have











I've served my sentence: the cell-door opens: and yet,  
 You would have done that fifteen-years-hard willingly?  
 Some folk can only thrive in gaol—no nerve  
 To face the risks outside; and never happy  
 Till lagged for life: meals punctual and no cares:  
 And the king for landlord. While I've eaten my head off,  
 You've been a galled jade, fretting for the stable.  
 Tastes differ: but it's just that you're not my sort  
 Puzzles me why you gave yourself to Jim.

JUDITH: There are no whys and wherefores, when you  
 love.

BELL: I gave myself to Peter, with a difference.  
 You'd have wed Jim: I just let Peter travel  
 With me, to keep the others from pestering;  
 And scooted him when Michael could manage the sheep.

JUDITH: You never loved him. I loved Jim . . .

BELL: A deal  
 Of difference that's made!

JUDITH: More than you can guess.

BELL: Peter stuck longer, tangled in the brambles.

JUDITH: I loved Jim; so, I trusted him.

BELL: But when  
 You found him out?

JUDITH: If you had loved, you'd ken  
 That finding out makes little difference.

There are things in this life you don't understand,  
 For all your ready tongue.

BELL: Ay: men and women  
 I've given up—just senseless marionettes,  
 Jigging and bobbing to the twitching strings:  
 Though I like to fancy I pick my steps, and choose



The tunes I dance to ; happen, that's my pride ;  
But, choose or not, we've got to pay the piper.

JUDITH : Ay : in your pride, you think you've the  
best of life.

You're missing more than you reckon, the best of all.

BELL : Well, I've no turn for penal servitude.

But, have you never gabbed to keep your heart up ?

What are hats for, if not for talking through ?

Pride—we've both pride ; yours, hot and fierce, and  
mine

Careless and cold : yet, both came the same cropper—

Not quite . . . for you were hurt to death almost :

While I picked myself up, scatheless ; not a scratch ;

Only my skirt torn ; and it always dragged.

JUDITH : You never cared : I couldn't have borne  
myself,

If I'd not cared : I'd hate myself as much

As I've hated Jim, whiles, when I thought of all.

They're mixter-maxter, hate and love : and, often,

I've wondered if I loathed, or loved, Jim most.

I understand as little as you, it seems :

Yet, it's only caring counts for anything

In this life ; though it's caring's broken me.

BELL : It stiffens some. But, why take accidents

So bitterly ? It's all a rough-and-tumble

Of accidents, from the accident of birth

To the last accident that lays us out—

A go-as-you-please, and the devil take the hindmost.

It's pluck that counts, and an easy seat in the saddle :

Better to break your neck at the first ditch,

Than waste the day in seeking gates to slip through :



Cold-blooded crawlers I've no sort of use for.  
 You took the leap, and landed in the quickset :  
 But, at least, you leapt sky-high, before you tumbled :  
 And it's silly to lie moaning in the prickles :  
 Best pick yourself up sharp, and shake the thorns out,  
 Else the following hoofs will bash you. Give life leave  
 To break your heart, 'twill trample you . . .

JUDITH : Leave, say you?  
 Life takes French-leave : your heart's beneath the hoofs  
 Before . . .

BELL : But grin, and keep yourself heartwhole ;  
 And you'll find the fun of the fair's in taking chances :  
 It's the uncertainty makes the race—no sport  
 In putting money on dead-certainties.  
 I back the dark horse ; stake my soul against  
 The odds : and I'll not grouse if life should prove  
 A welsher in the end : I'll have had my fling,  
 At least : and yet talk's cheap . . .

JUDITH : Ay, cheap.

BELL : Dirt-cheap :  
 Three-shots-a-penny ; and it's not every time  
 You hit Aunt Sally and get a good cigar,  
 Or even pot a milky coconut :  
 And, all this while, life's had the upper hand :  
 I slipt, the day I came ; and lost my grip :  
 Life got me by the scruff of the neck, and held  
 My proud nose to the grindstone. My turn, now—  
 I'll be upsides with life, and teach it manners,  
 Before death gets the stranglehold : I'll have  
 The last laugh, though it choke me. And what's death,  
 To set us twittering ? I'll be no frightened squirrel :

Scarting and scolding never yet scared death :  
 When he's a mind to crack me like a nut,  
 I'd be no husk : still ripe and milky, I'd have him  
 Swallow the kernel, and spit out the shell,  
 Before all's shrivelled to black dust. But, tombstones,  
 What's turned my thoughts to death ? It's these white  
 walls,

After a day in the open. When I came,  
 At first, these four walls seemed to close in on me,  
 As though they'd crush the life out : and I felt  
 I'd die between them : but, after all . . . And yet,  
 Who kens what green sod's to be broken for him ?  
 Queer, that I'll lie, like any innocent  
 Beneath the daisies ; but the gowans must wait.  
 Sore-punished, I'm not yet knocked out : life's had  
 My head in chancery ; but I'll soon be free  
 To spar another round or so with him,  
 Before he sends me spinning to the ropes.  
 And life would not be life, without the hazards.

JUDITH : Too many hazards for me.

BELL : Ay : so it seems :  
 But you're too honest for the tricky game.  
 I've a sort of honesty—a liar and thief  
 In little things—I'm honesty itself  
 In the things that matter—few enough, deuce kens :  
 But your heart's open to the day ; while mine's  
 A pitchy night, with just a star or so  
 To light me to cover at the keeper's step.  
 You're honest, to your hurt : your honesty's  
 A knife that cuts through all ; and will be cutting—  
 Hacking and jabbing, and thirsting to draw blood ;













Yet I didn't leave, till she was safely off  
To work . . .

BELL: Work? Michael, too, had business  
In Bellingham this morning, oddly enough.  
Doubtless, they helped each other; and got through  
The job the quicker, working well together:  
And a parson took a hand in it for certain,  
If I ken Michael: likes things proper, he does;  
And always had a weakness for black lambs.  
But, who'd have guessed he'd . . . Surely, there's a  
strain

Of Haggard in the young limb, after all:  
No Haggard stops to ask a parent's leave,  
Even should they happen to ken the old folk by  
sight:

My own I knew by hearsay. But, what luck  
You're here to welcome the young pair.

JUDITH: No! They'll wonder . . .  
I bring no luck to weddings . . . I must go . . .

BELL: You can't, without being spotted: but you  
can hide

Behind the door, till I speak with them.

JUDITH: No! No!  
Not that door . . . I can't hide behind that door  
Again.

BELL: That door? Well, you ken best what's been  
Between that door and you. It's crazy and old,  
But, it looks innocent, wooden-faced humbug: yet  
I don't trust doors myself; they've got a knack  
Of shutting me in. But you'll be snug enough  
In the other room: I'd advise you to lie down,

And rest ; you're looking trashed : and, come to think, I've a deal to say to the bridegroom, before I go.

JUDITH : Go ?

BELL : Quick, this way : step lively, or they'll catch Your skirt-tail whisking round the doorcheek.

(BELL *hustles* JUDITH *into the inner room ; closing the door behind her. She then thrusts the orange-coloured kerchief into her pocket ; picks up the bracken, and flings it on the fire ; seats herself on the settle, with her back to the door ; and gazes at the blaze : not even glancing up, as* MICHAEL *and* RUTH *enter.*)

MICHAEL : Mother !

BELL : Is that you, Prodigal son ? You're late, to-day, As always when you've business in Bellingham. That's through, I trust : those ewes have taken a deal Of seeing to : and I'm lonely as a milestone, When you're away.

MICHAEL : I've taken the last trip, mother : That job's through : and I've made the best of bargains. You'll not be lonely, now, when I'm not here : I've brought you a daughter to keep you company.

BELL (*turning sharply*) : I might have known you were no Prodigal son : He didn't bring home even a single sausage, For all his keeping company with swine. But, what should I do with a daughter, lad ? Do you fancy, if I'd had a mind for daughters, I couldn't have had a dozen of my own ? One petticoat's enough in any house : And who are you, to bring your mother a daughter ?



His haunches quiver, for all his woolly coat ;  
 He'll prove a Haggard, yet. Nay—he said “ husband ” :  
 No Haggard I've heard tell on's been a husband :  
 But, if your taste's for husbands, lass, you're suited,  
 Till doomsday, as he says. He kens his mind :  
 When barely breeched, he chose to bide with sheep ;  
 Though he might have travelled with horses : and it's  
 sheep

His heart is set on still. But, I've no turn  
 For certainties myself : no sheep for me :  
 Life, with a tossing mane, and clattering hoofs,  
 The chancy life for me—not certain death,  
 With the stink of tar and sheepdip in my nostrils.

MICHAEL : Life, with a clattering tongue, you mean  
 to say.

BELL : Well : you're a bonnie lass, I must admit :  
 And, if I'd fancied daughters, I might have done  
 Much worse than let young Michael pick them for me :  
 He's not gone poseying in the kitchen garden.  
 I never guessed he'd an eye for aught but ewes :  
 As, blind as other mothers, I'd have sworn  
 I'd kened him, inside-out, since he was—nay !  
 But he was never a rapscallion ripstitch—  
 Always a prim and proper little man,  
 A butter-won't-melt-in-my-mouth young sobersides,  
 Since he found his own feet. Yet, the blade that's wed—  
 The jack-knife, turned into a pair of scissors—  
 Without a word, is not the son I thought him.  
 There's something of his mammy, after all,  
 In Michael : and as for you, my lass, you're just  
 Your minney's very spit.

RUTH :                                You ken my mother ?

BELL : Ken Judith Ellershaw ? You'll ask me, next,  
If I'm acquainted with Bell Haggard. Well,  
Gaping for turnips, Michael ?

MICHAEL :                                I never heard . . .

BELL : What have you heard this fifteen-year, except  
The bleat of sheep, till Ruth's voice kittled your ear ?  
But, Judith sent some message by her daughter ?

RUTH : She doesn't ken I've come : nay, doesn't dream  
I'm married even ; though I meant to tell her  
This morning ; but I couldn't : she started so,  
When I let slip Michael's name ; and turned so pale.  
I don't know why ; but I feared some word of hers  
Might come between us : and I couldn't let  
Even my mother come between us now :  
So, I pretended to set out for work  
As usual : then, when we were married, went back  
With Michael, to break the news. But the door was  
locked :

And neighbours said she was out—been gone some time :  
And Michael was impatient to be home :  
So, I had to come. I can't think what has happened.  
I hated leaving her like that : I've never  
In all my life done such a thing.

BELL :                                        Well, Michael  
Should be relieved to learn it's a first offence.

RUTH : She'd gone without a word . . .

BELL :                                        A family failing—  
And, happen, on like errand to your own.

RUTH : Mother ? Nay, she's too old : you said you  
knew her.



BELL : Ay, well enough to reckon I'm her elder :  
 And who's to tell me I'm too old to marry ?  
 A woman is never too old for anything :  
 It's only men grow sober and faint-hearted :  
 And Judith's just the sort whose soul is set  
 On a husband and a hearthstone : I ken that.

RUTH : Nay : mother'll never marry.

BELL : You can speak  
 With all the cock-a-whoop of ignorance :  
 For you're too young to dare to doubt your wisdom.  
 It's a wise man, or a fool, can speak for himself,  
 Let alone for others, in this haphazard life.  
 But give me a young fool, rather than an old—  
 A plucky plunger, than a canny crone  
 Who's old enough to ken she doesn't ken.  
 You're right : for doubting is a kind of dotage :  
 Experience ages and decays ; while folk  
 Who never doubt themselves die young—at ninety.  
 Age never yet brought gumption to a ninny :  
 And you cannot reckon up a stranger's wits  
 By counting his bare patches and grey hairs :  
 It's seldom sense that makes a bald head shine :  
 And I'm not partial to Methuselahs.  
 Keep your cocksureness, while you can : too soon,  
 Time plucks the feathers off you ; and you lie,  
 Naked and skewered, with not a cock-a-doodle,  
 Or flap of the wings to warm your heart again.  
 And so, you quitted your mammy, without a word,  
 When the jockey whistled ?

RUTH : Nay : I left a letter :  
 'Twas all I could do.



BELL :                                 She's lost a daughter ; and got  
A bit of paper, instead : and what have I,  
For my lost son ?

MICHAEL :             You've lost no son ; but gained  
A daughter. You'll always live with us.

BELL :   Just so.  
I've waited for you to say that : and it comes pat.  
You'll think his thoughts ; and mutter them in your  
mind,

Before he can give them tongue, Ruth. He's not said  
An unexpected thing since he grew out  
Of his first breeches : and, like the most of men,  
He speaks so slowly, you can almost catch  
The creaking of his wits between the words.

RUTH : Well: I've a tongue for two : and you, yourself,  
Don't lack for . . .

BELL :                                 So, all's settled : you've arranged  
The world for your convenience ; and have planned  
Your mothers' lives between you ? I'm to be  
The dear old grannie in the ingleneuk ;  
And hide my grizzled wisps in a mutch with frills ?  
Nay, God forbid ! I'm no tame pussycat,  
To snuggle on the corner of a settle,  
With one eye open for the chance-thrown titbit,  
While the good housewife goes about her duties :  
Me ! lapping with blinking eyes and possing paws,  
The saucer of skim-milk that young skinflint spares me,  
And purring, when her darlings pull my tail—  
Great-grandchildren, too, to Ezra, on both sides.  
Ay : you may gape like a brace of guddled brandling :  
But that old bull-trout's grandsire to you both ;

And a double dose of his blue blood will run  
In the veins of your small fry—if fish have veins.

MICHAEL : You surely never mean to say . . .

BELL : I do.

More than a little for you young know-alls to learn,  
When you meet Judith Ellershaw : for havers  
As it sounds to your young lugs, the world went round,  
And one or two things happened, before you were born.  
Yet, none of us kens what life's got up his sleeve :  
He's played so long : and had a deal of practice,  
Since he sat down with Adam : he's always got  
A trump tucked out of sight, that takes the trick.  
But, son, you've lived with me for all these years ;  
And yet ken me so little ? Grannie's mutch-frills !  
I'd as lief rig myself in widow's weeds  
For my fancy man, who may have departed this life,  
For all I ken or care.

MICHAEL : Come, hold your tongue :

Enough of shameless talk. I'm master, now :  
And I'll not have Ruth hear this radgy slack.  
If you've no shame yourself, I'll find a way  
To bridle your loose tongue : so mind yourself :  
I'll have no tinker's tattle.

BELL : The tinker's brat

Rides the high-horse now, mounted on prime mutton.  
Ruth, lass, you're safe, you're safe—if safety's all :  
He'll never guess your heart, unless you blab.  
I've never told him mine : I've kept him easy,  
Till he'd found someone else to victual him,  
And make his bed, and darn his hose ; and you  
Seem born to take the job out of my hands.

RUTH : But I'd not come between you . . .

BELL : Think not, lass ?

I bear you no ill-will : you set me free.

I'm a wildcat, all bristling fur and claws :

At Krindlesyke, I've been a wildcat, caged :

And Michael never twigged ! Son, don't you mind

The day we came—was I a tabby then ?

The day we came here, with no thought to bide,

Once we had got the plunder ; and were trapped

Between these four white walls by a dead woman ?

She held me—forced my feet into her shoes—

Held me for your sake. Ay : there seemed some  
link

"Twixt your dead grannie and you, too strong for me  
To break ; though it's been strained to the snapping-  
point,

Times out of mind, whenever a hoolet's screech

Sang through my blood ; or poaching foxes barked

On a shiny night to the cackle of wild geese,

Travelling from sea to sea far overhead :

Or whenever, waking in the quiet dark,

The ghosts of horses whinneyed in my heart.

Ghosts ! Nay, I've been the mare between the limmers

Who hears the hunters gallop gaily by ;

Or, rather, the hunter, bogged in a quaking moss,

Fankit in sluthery strothers, belly-deep,

With the tune of the horn tally-hoing through her  
blood,

As the field sweeps out of sight.

MICHAEL : Wildcats and hunters—

A mongrel breed, eh, Ruth ?



For she'd traik any distance for a crack,  
The gipsy-hearted ganwife that she was.

MICHAEL: Wildcats and hunters and the Queen of  
Sheba—

A royal family, Ruth, you've married into!

BELL: But now I can kick Eliza's shoes sky-high:  
Nay—I must shuffle them quietly off; and lay  
The old wife's shoes decently by the hearth,  
As I found them when I came—a slattern stopgap—  
Ready for the young wife to step into.  
They'll fit her, as they never fitted me:  
For all her youth, they will not gall her heels,  
Or give her corns: she's the true Cinderella:  
The clock has struck for her; and the dancing's done;  
And the Prince has brought her home—to wash the  
dishes.

But now I'm free: and I'll away to-night.  
My bones have been restless in me all day long:  
They felt their freedom coming, before I kened.  
I've little time to lose: I'm getting old—  
Stiff-jointed in my wits, that once were nimble  
As a ferret among the bobtails, old and dull.  
A night or so may seem to matter little,  
When I've already lost full fifteen-year:  
But I hear the owls call: and my fur's a-tingle:  
The Haggard blood is pricking in my veins.

*(She loosens the string of her apron, which slips  
to the ground, kilts her skirt to her knee,  
takes the orange-coloured kerchief from her  
pocket, and twists it about her head; while  
MICHAEL and RUTH watch the transformation  
in amazement.)*



MICHAEL : But you don't mean to leave us ?

BELL : Pat it comes :  
You've just to twitch the wire and the bell rings :  
You'll learn the trick, soon, Ruth. (*To MICHAEL*) Bat,  
don't you see

I've just put on my nightcap, ready for bed—  
Grannie's frilled mutch ? I leave you, Michael ? Son,  
The time came, as it comes to every man,  
When you'd to make a choice betwixt two women.  
You've made your choice : and chosen well : but I,  
Who've always done the choosing, and never yet  
Tripped to the beck of any man, or bobbed  
To any living woman—I'm free to follow  
My own bent, now that that old witch's fingers  
Have slackened their cold clutch ; and your dead  
grannie

Has gained her ends, and seen you settled down  
At Krindlesyke : and from this on I, too,  
Am dead to you. You'll soon enough forget me :  
The world would end if a man could not forget  
His mother's deathbed in his young wife's arms—  
I'm far from corpse-cold yet ; and it may be years  
Before they pluck Bell Haggard's kerchief off,  
To tie her chin up with, and ripe her pockets  
Of her last pennies to shut up her eyes.  
Even then, they'll have to tug the chin-clout tight,  
To keep her tongue from wagging. Well, my son,  
So, it's good-bye till doomsday.

MICHAEL : You're not going ?  
I thought you only havered. You can't go.  
Do you think I'd let you go, and . . .





And I won't let you shame me. I've been decent ;  
 And have always done my duty by the sheep,  
 Working to keep a decent home together  
 To bring a wife to : and, for all your jeers,  
 There are worse things for a woman than a home  
 And husband and a lawful family.  
 You shall not go. You say I ken my mind . . .

BELL : Ay : but not mine. What should a tinker's  
 trollop  
 Do in the house of Michael Barrasford,  
 But bring a blush to his children's cheeks ? God help  
 them,  
 If they take after me, if they've a dash  
 Of Haggard blood—for ewe's milk laced with brandy  
 Is like to curdle : or, happen, I should say,  
 God help their father !

MICHAEL : Mother, why should you go ?  
 Why should you want to travel the ditch-bottom,  
 When you've a hearth to sit by, snug and clean ?

BELL : The fatted calf's to be killed for the prodigal  
 mother ?  
 You've not the hard heart of the young cockrobin  
 That's got no use for parents, once he's mated :  
 But I'm, somehow, out of place within four walls,  
 Tied to one spot—that never wander the world.  
 I long for the rumble of wheels beneath me ; to hear  
 The clatter and creak of the lurching caravan ;  
 And the daylong patter of raindrops on the roof :  
 Ay, and the gossip of nights about the campfire—  
 The give-and-take of tongues : mine's getting stiff  
 For want of use, and spoiling for a fight.

MICHAEL : Nay : still as nimble and nippy as a flea !

BELL : But, I could talk, at one time ! There are days  
When the whole world's hoddendoon and draggletailed,  
Drooked through and through ; and blurry, gurlly days  
When the wind blows snell : but it's something to be  
stirring,

And not shut up between four glowering walls,  
Like blind white faces ; and you never ken  
What traveller your wayside fire will draw  
Out of the night, to tell outlandish tales,  
Or crack a jest, or start quarrel with you,  
Till the words bite hot as ginger on the tongue.

Anger's the stuff to loose a tongue grown rusty :

And keep it in good fettle for all chances.

I'm sick of dozing by a dumb hearthstone—

And the peat, with never a click or crackle in it—

Famished for news.

MICHAEL : For scandal.

BELL : There's no scandal

For those who can't be scandalized—just news :

All's fish that comes to their net. I was made

For company.

MICHAEL : And you'd go back again  
To that tag-rag-and-bobtail ? What's the use  
Of a man's working to keep a decent home,  
When his own mother tries to drag him down ?

BELL : Nay : my pernicketty, fine gentleman,  
But I'll not drag you down : you're free of me :  
I've slipt my apron off ; and you're tied now  
To your wife's apron-strings : for menfolk seem  
Uneasy on the loose, and never happy

## BELL HAGGARD

Unless they're clinging to some woman's skirt,  
I'm out of place in any decent house,  
As a kestrel in a hencoop. Ay, you're decent :  
But, son, remember a man's decency  
Depends on his braces ; and it's I who've sewn  
Your trouser-buttons on ; so, when you fasten  
Your galluses, give the tinker's baggage credit.  
She's done her best for you ; and scrubbed and scoured,  
Against the grain, for all these years, to keep  
Your home respectable ; though, in her heart,  
Thank God, she's never been respectable—  
No dry-rot in her bones, while she's alive :  
Time and to spare for decency in the grave.  
So, you can do your duty by the sheep,  
While I go hunting with the jinneyhoolets—  
Birds of a feather—ay, and fleece with fleece :  
And when I'm a toothless, mumbling crone, you'll be  
So proper a gentleman, 'twill be hard to tell  
The shepherd from the sheep. Someone must rear  
The mutton and wool, to keep us warm and fed ;  
But that's not my line : please to step this way  
For the fancy goods and fakish faldalals,  
Trinkets and toys and fairings. Son, you say,  
You're master here : well, that's for Ruth to settle :  
I'll be elsewhere. I've never knuckled down  
To any man : and I'll be coffin-cold  
Before I brook a master ; so, good-night,  
And pleasant dreams ; and a long family  
Of curly lambkins, bleating round the board.

RUTH : Michael, you'll never let her go alone ?  
She's only talking wild, because she's jealous.





BELL: While you've a roof to shelter me, eh, son?  
You mean so well; and understand so little.  
Yours is a good thick fleece—no skin that twitches  
When a breath tickles it. Sheep will be sheep,  
And horses, horses, till the day of judgment.

MICHAEL: Better a sound tup than a spavined  
nag.

BELL: Ay, Ruth, you've kindled him! Good luck  
to you:

And may your hearthfire warm you to the end.

(To MICHAEL.)

You've been a good son to me, in your way:  
Only, our ways are different; and here they part.  
For all my blether, there's no bitterness  
On my side: I've long kenned 'twas bound to come:  
And, in your heart, you know it's for the best,  
For your sake, and for Ruth's sake, and for mine.  
I couldn't obey, where I have bid; nor risk  
My own son's fathering me in second childhood:  
And you'd not care to have me like old Ezra,  
A dothering haiveril in your chimney corner,  
Babbling of vanished gold? I read my fortune  
In the flames just now: and I'll not rot to death:  
It's time enough to moulder, underground.  
My death'll come quick and chancy, as I'd have had  
Each instant of life: but still there are risky years  
Before me, and a sudden, unlooked-for ending.  
And I'll not haunt you: ghosts enough, with Ezra,  
Counting his ghostly sovereigns all night long,  
And old Eliza, darning ghostly stockings.  
My ghost will ride a broomstick. . . .



*(As she speaks, the inner door opens, and RUTH and MICHAEL, turning sharply at the click of the latch, gaze, dumbfounded, at JUDITH ELLERSHAW, standing in the doorway.)*

BELL : Fee-fo-fum !

The barguest bays ; and boggles, brags, and bo-los  
Follow the hunt. How's that for witchcraft, think you ?  
Hark, how the lych-owl screeches !

RUTH *(running to her mother's arms)* : Mother, you !

BELL : Now there's a sweet, domestic picture for you !  
My cue's to vanish in a puff of smoke  
And reek of brimstone, like the witch I am.  
I'm coming, hoolet, my old cat with wings !  
It's time I was away : there never yet  
Was room for two grandmothers in one house.  
I'm through with Krindlesyke. Good-bye, old gaol !

*(While MICHAEL still gazes at RUTH and her mother in amazement, BELL HAGGARD slips out of the door, unnoticed, and away through the bracken in the gathering dusk. An owl hoots.)*

### PART III

*A wet afternoon in May, six years later. The table is already set for tea. JUDITH ELLERSHAW sits, knitting, by the hearth; a cradle with a young baby in it by her side. The outer door is closed, but unlatched. Presently the unkempt head of a man appears furtively at the window; then vanishes. The door is pushed stealthily open: and JIM BARRAS-FORD, ragged and disreputable (and some twenty years older than when he married PHOEBE MARTIN) stands on the threshold a moment, eyeing JUDITH'S unconscious back in silence: then he speaks, limping towards her chair.*

JIM: While the cat callevers the hills of Back-o'-Beyont,

The rats make free of the rick: and so, you doubled,  
As soon as my hurdies were turned on Krindlesyke,  
And settled yourself in the ingle?

JUDITH (*starting up, and facing him*): Jim!

JIM:

Ay, Jim—

No other, Judith. I'll be bound you weren't  
Just looking to see me: you seem overcome

By the unexpected pleasure. Your pardon, mistress,  
 If I intrude. By crikes! But I'm no ghost  
 To set you adither: you don't see anything wrong—  
 No, no! What should you see? I startled you.  
 Happen I look a wee bit muggerrishlike—  
 A ragtag hipplety-clinch: but I've been travelling  
 Mischancy roads; and I'm fair muggert-up.  
 Yet, why should that stagnate you? Where's the sense  
 Of expecting a mislucket man like me  
 To be as snod and spruce as a young shaver?  
 But I'm all right: there's naught amiss with Jim,  
 Except too much of nothing in his belly.  
 A good square meal, and a pipe, and a decent night's  
 rest,

And I'll be fit as a fiddle. I've hardly slept . . .  
 Well, now I'm home, I'll make myself at home.

*(He seizes the loaf of bread from the table; hacks  
 off a hunch with his jack-knife; and wolfs it  
 ravenously.)*

JUDITH: Home? You've come home, Jim?

JIM: Nay, I'm my own fetch!

God's truth! there's little else but skin and bone  
 Beneath these tatters: just a two-legged boggart,  
 With naught but wind to fill my waim—small wonder  
 You're maiselt, to see a scarecrow stottering in—  
 For plover's eggs and heather-broth don't sleek  
 A wrinkled hide or swell a scrankit belly.  
 But still, what should there be to flabbergast you  
 About a man's returning to his home?  
 Naught wrong in coming home, I hope? By gox,  
 A poor lad can't come home, but he's cross-questioned,

And stared at like . . . Why do you stare like that?  
 It's I should be agape, to find you here :  
 But no, I'm not surprised : you can't surprise me :  
 I'm a travelled man : I've seen the world ; and so,  
 Don't look for gratitude. My eyes were opened,  
 Once and for all, by Phœbe and you, that day—  
 Nigh twenty-year since : and they've not been shut . . .  
 By gum, that's so ! it seems like twenty-year  
 Since I'd a wink of sleep . . . And, anyway,  
 I've heard the story, all the goings-on ;  
 And a pretty tale it is : for I'd a drink,  
 A sappy-crack with that old windywallops,  
 Sep Shanks, in a bar at Bellingham : and he let out  
 How you'd crawled back to Krindlesyke with your  
 daughter—

Our daughter, I should say : and she, no less,  
 Married to Peter's son : though how the deuce  
 You picked him up, is more that I can fashion.  
 Sep had already had his fill of cheerers,  
 Before I met him ; and that last rum-hot  
 Was just the drop too much : and he got fuddled.  
 Ay, Sep was mortal-clay, the addled egg :  
 And I couldn't make head or tail of his hiccuping,  
 Though he tried to make himself plain : he did his best,  
 Did Sep : I'll say that for him—tried so hard  
 To make himself plain, he got us both chucked out :  
 And I left him in the gutter, trying still.

JUDITH : You've come from Bellingham hiring ?

JIM : I couldn't stand

The dindum : felt fair-clumpered in that cluther—  
 Such a hubblyshew of gowks and flirtigigs,

Craking and cackling like a gabble of geese :  
 And folk kept looking : I might have been a bizen,  
 The way they gaped : so I thought I'd just win home  
 For a little peace and quiet. Where's my daughter,  
 And this young cuckoo, calls himself my nephew,  
 And has made himself free and easy of my nest ?  
 Ay, but you've fettled things nicely, the lot of you,  
 While I tramped the hungry roads. He's pinched my  
 job :

But I bear no grudge : it's not a job I'm after,  
 Since I've a married daughter I can live with.  
 I've seen the world, a sight too much : and I mean  
 To settle down, and end my days in peace  
 In my old home.

JUDITH :           Your home? But you can't stay  
 here.

JIM : You'll see! Now that I'm home, I mean to  
 clag

Like a cleaver to a flagstone : they'll have to lift  
 The hearth, to get me out of Krindlesyke.  
 I've had enough of travelling the turnpike,  
 Houffling and hirpling like a cadging faa :  
 And, but for you and your brat, I'd settled down,  
 A respectable married man, this twenty-year.  
 But you shan't drive me from my home again.

JUDITH : We drove you ?

JIM :                               You began it, anyway—  
 Made me an April-gowk and laughing-stock,  
 Till I couldn't face the neighbours' fleers. By joes !  
 You diddled me out of house and home, among you :  
 And settled yourselves couthily in my calfyard,



Like maggots in a muckheap, while I went cawdrife.  
 But I've had my fill of it, Judith, Hexham-measure :  
 I'm home for good : and isn't she my daughter ?  
 You stole her from me once, when you made off  
 With hoity-toity Phœbe—ay, I ken  
 She died : I learned it at the time—you sneaked  
 My only bairn : I cannot mind her name,  
 If ever I heard it : you kept even that  
 From me, her dad. But, anyway, she's mine :  
 I've only her and you to turn to now :  
 A poor, lone widower I've been any time  
 This twenty-year : that's what's been wrong with me,  
 Though it hadn't entered my noddle till this minute.  
 But where's the canny couple ?

JUDITH : Ruth and Michael  
 Are at the hiring.

JIM : Well, I'll not deny  
 That suits my book. I'd a notion, Judith lass,  
 I'd find you alone, and make my peace with you,  
 Before I tackled the young folk. Poor relations  
 Aren't made too welcome in this ungrateful world—  
 Least so, by those who've taken the bread from their  
 mouths,  
 And beggared them of bit and brat : and so  
 I thought 'twould be more couthy-like with you,  
 Just having a crack and talking old times over,  
 Till I was more myself. I don't like strangers,  
 Not even when they're my own flesh and blood :  
 They've got a trick of staring at a man : .  
 And all I want is to be let alone—  
 Just let alone . . . By God, why can't they let me



Alone! But you are kind and comfortable:  
 And you won't heckle me and stare at me:  
 For I'm not quite myself: I'll own to that—  
 I'm not myself . . . Though who the devil I am  
 I hardly ken . . . I've been that hunted and harried.

JUDITH: Hunted?

JIM: Ay, Judith—in a manner of  
 speaking,

Hunted's the word: and I'm too old for the sport.  
 I'm getting on in years: and you're no younger  
 Than when I saw you last—you mind the day,  
 My wedding-day? A fine fligarishon  
 You made of it between you, you and Phœbe:  
 And wasn't she the high and mighty madam,  
 The nifty-naffy don't-come-nigh-me nonesuch?  
 But I've forgiven her: I bear no malice.

JUDITH: You bear no malice: and she died of it!

JIM: Ay, ay: she showed some sense of decency  
 In that, at least: though she got her sting in first  
 Like an angry bee. But, Judith, doesn't it seem  
 We two are tokened to end our days together?  
 Nothing can keep us parted, seemingly:  
 So let by-gones be by-gones.

*(Catching sight of the cradle.)*

What, another!

Have you always got a brat about you, Judith?  
 Last time you sprang a daughter on me, and now . . .  
 But I'm forgetting how the years have flitted.  
 Don't tell me I'm a grandfather?

JUDITH: The boy  
 Is Ruth's.

JIM : Well, I've come into a family,  
 And no mistake—a happy family :  
 And I was born to be a family-man.  
 They'll never turn against their bairn's granddad :  
 And I'm in luck.

JUDITH : You cannot bide here, Jim.

JIM : And who the hell are you, to say me nay ?

JUDITH : The boy's grandmother.

JIM : Ay: and so the  
 grandam's

To sit in the ingleneuk, while granddad hoofs it ?

JUDITH : When you left Krindlesyke, you quitted it  
 For good and all.

JIM : And yet, I'm here again,  
 Unless I'm dreaming. It seems we all come back  
 To Krindlesyke, like martins to the byre-baulks :  
 It draws us back—can't keep away, nohow.  
 Ay, first and last, the old gaol is my home.  
 You're surely forgetting . . .

JUDITH : I'm forgetting nothing.  
 It's you've the knack of only recollecting  
 What you've a mind to. How could you have come  
 If you remembered all these walls have seen ?

JIM : So walls have eyes as well as ears ? I can't  
 Get away from eyes . . . But they'll not freeze my  
 blood,

Or stare me out of countenance : they've no tongues  
 To tittle-tattle : they're no tell-tale-tits,  
 No slinking skeadlicks, nosing and sniffing round,  
 To wink and nod when I turn my back, colloguing,  
 With heads together, to lay me by the heels.

Nay : I'm not fleyed of a bit of whitewashed plaister.  
 But you're a nice one to welcome home a traveller  
 With "cannots" and clavers of eyes. Why can't you let  
 Things rest, and not hark back, routing things out,  
 And casting them in my teeth ? Why must you lug  
 The dead to light—dead days ? . . . I'm not afraid  
 Of corpses : the dead are dead : their eyes are shut :  
 Leastways, they cannot glower when once the mould's  
 Atop of them : though they follow a chap round the  
 room,

Seeking the coppers to clap them to . . . dead eyes  
 Can't wink : and twopence shuts their bravest stare.  
 So, ghosts won't trouble my rest at Krindlesyke.  
 I vowed that I'd sleep sound at Krindlesyke,  
 When I . . .

JUDITH : You cannot bide.

JIM : I bear no malice.

Why can't you let bygones be bygones ? But that's  
 A woman all over ; must be raking up  
 The ashes into a glow, and puffing them red,  
 To roast a man for what he did, or didn't,  
 Twenty-year syne. Why should you still bear malice ?

JUDITH : I bear no malice : but you cannot bide.

JIM : Why do you keep cuckooing "cannot, cannot" ?  
 And who's to turn me out of Krindlesyke,  
 Where I was born and bred, I'd like to ken ?  
 You can't gainsay it's my home.

JUDITH : Not your home now.

JIM : Then who the devil's home . . .

JUDITH : It's Ruth's and  
 Michael's.

JIM : My daughter's and her man's : their home's my home.

JUDITH : You shall not stay.

JIM : It's got to "shall not" now?

The cuckoo's changed his tune ; but I can't say  
I like the new note better : it's too harsh :  
The gowk's grown croupy. But, lass, I never thought  
You'd be harsh with me : yet even you've turned  
raspy . . .

First "cannot," then . . .

JUDITH : Nay ! I'll not have their home

Pulled down about their ears by any man ;  
And least of all by you—the home they've made . . .

JIM : Stolen, I'd say.

JUDITH : Together, for themselves

And their three boys.

JIM : Jim, granddad three times over ?  
It's well you broke it piecemeal : the old callant's  
A waffly heart ; and any sudden joy  
Just sets it twittering : but the more the merrier !

JUDITH : You shall not wreck their happiness. I'd  
not dreamed

Such happiness as theirs could be in this world.  
Since it was built, there's not been such a home  
At Krindlesyke : it's only been a house . . .

JIM : 'Twas just about as homely as a hearse  
In my young days : but my luck's turned, it seems.

JUDITH : It takes more than four walls to make a  
home,

And such a home as Michael's made for Ruth.  
 Though she's a fendy lass ; she's too like me,  
 And needs a helpmate, or she'll waste herself ;  
 And, with another man, she might have wrecked,  
 Instead of building. She's got her man, her mate :  
 Husband and father, born, day in, day out,  
 He works to keep a home for wife and weans.  
 There's never been a luckier lass than Ruth :  
 Though she deserves it, too ; and it's but seldom  
 Good lasses are the lucky ones ; and few  
 Get their deserts in this life.

JIM : True, egos !

JUDITH : Few, good or bad. But Ruth has every-  
 thing—

A home, a steady husband, and her boys.  
 There never were such boys.

JIM : A pretty picture :  
 It takes my fancy : and the dear old grannie,  
 Why do you leave her out ? And there's a corner  
 For granddad in it, surely—an armchair  
 On the other side of the ingle, with a pipe  
 And packet of twist, and a pot of nappy beer,  
 Hot-fettled four-ale, handy on the hob ?

Ay : there's the chair : I'd best secure it now.

*(As he seats himself, with his back to the door,  
 the head of BELL HAGGARD, in her orange-  
 coloured kerchief, peeps round the jamb :  
 then slowly withdraws, unseen of JIM or  
 JUDITH.)*

JIM : Fetch up the swipes and shag. I can reach the  
 cutty . . .



*(He takes down MICHAEL'S pipe from the mantel-shelf; and sticks it between his teeth: but JUDITH snatches at it, breaking the stem, and flings the bowl on the fire.)*

JUDITH: And you, to touch his pipe!

*(JIM stares at her, startled, as she stands before him, with drawn face and set teeth: then, still eyeing her uneasily, begins to bluster.)*

JIM: You scarting randy!

I'll teach you manners. That's a good three-halfpence  
Smashed into smithereens: and all for nothing.  
I've lammed a wench for less. I've half a mind  
To snap you like the stopple, you yackey-yaa!  
De'il rive your sark! It's long since I've had the price  
Of a clay in my pouch: and I'm half-dead for a puff.  
What's taken you? What's set you agee with me?  
You used to like me; and you always seemed  
A menseful body: and I lippeden to you.  
But you're just a wheepie-leekie weathercock  
Like the lave of women, when a man's mislucket,  
Moidart and mismeaved and beside himself.  
I fancied I'd be in clover at Krindlesyke,  
With you and all: but, sink me, if I haven't  
Just stuck my silly head into a bee-bike!  
What's turned you vicious? I only want to smoke  
A cutty in peace: and you go on the rampage.  
I mustn't smoke young master's pipe, it seems—  
His pipe, no less! Young cock-a-ride-a-roosie  
Is on the muckheap now; and all the hens  
Are clucking round him. I ken what it is:  
The cockmadendy's been too easy with you.



It doesn't do to let you womenfolk  
 Get out of hand. It's time I came, i' faiks,  
 To pull you up, and keep you in your place.  
 I'll have no naggers, narr-narring all day long :  
 I'll stand no fantigues. If the cull's too soft . . .

JUDITH : Soft, did you say? I've seen him hike a  
 man,

And a heftier man than you, over a dyke,  
 For yarking a lame beast. That drover'll mind—  
 Ay, to his dying day, he'll not forget  
 He once ran into something hard.

JIM : Ay—ay . . .

He's that sort, is he? My luck is out again.  
 I want a quiet life, to be let alone :  
 And Krindlesyke won't be a bed of roses,  
 With that sort ramping round. (*Starting uneasily.*)

What's that? I thought . . .

There's no one in the other room, is there?  
 I've a feeling in my bones somebody's listening.  
 You've not deceived me, Judith? You've not trapped . . .  
 I'm all a-swither, sweating like a brock.  
 I little dreamt you'd turn against me, Judith :  
 But even here I don't feel safe now.

JUDITH : Safe?

JIM : So you don't know? I fancied everyone kenned.  
 Else why the devil should they stare like that?  
 And when you, too, looked . . . Nay, how could you  
 learn?

I'm davered, surely : Seppy Shank's rum  
 Has gone to my noddle : drink's the very devil  
 On an empty waim : and I never had a head.

What have I done? Ay, wouldn't you like to ken,  
To holler on the hounds?

JUDITH: Jim!

JIM: But what matter  
Whether you ken or not? You've done for me  
Already, dang you, with your hettle-tongue:  
You've put the notion in my head, the curs  
Are on my scent: and now, I cannot rest.  
Happen, they're slinking now up Bloodsyke,  
Like adders through the bent . . . Nay, they don't  
yelp,  
The hounds that sleuth me: it's only in my head  
I hear the yapping: they're too cunning to yelp.  
The sleichers slither after me on their bellies,  
As dumb and slick as adders . . . But I'm doitered,  
And doting like a doobby. I want to sleep . . .  
A good night's rest would pull my wits together.  
I swore I'd sleep . . . but I couldn't close an eye, now  
Since . . .

JUDITH: Jim, what ails you? Tell me what you've  
done.

I'm sorry, Jim . . .

JIM: I swear I never set out  
To do it, Judith; and the thing was done,  
Before I came to my senses: that's God's truth:  
And may hell blast . . . You're sorry? Nay, but Jim's  
Too old a bird to be caught with chaff. You're fly:  
But, Jim's fly, too. No: mum's the word.

JUDITH: O Jim,  
You, surely, never think I'd . . .

JIM: I don't know.

A man in my case can't tell who to trust,  
 When every mongrel's yowling for his carcase.  
 Mum's my best friend, the only one . . . though, whiles,  
 It's seemed even he had blabbered out my secrets,  
 And hollered them to rouse the countryside,  
 And draw all eyes on me. But, I must mizzle.

JUDITH: You're going, Jim?

JIM: I'll not be taken here,  
 Like a brock in his earth: I'll not be trapped and  
 torn . . .

Yet, I don't know. Why should I go? No worse  
 To be taken here than elsewhere: and I'm dead beat:  
 I'm all to rovers, my wit's all gone agate:  
 And how can I travel in these boots? A week since  
 The soles bid a fond farewell to the uppers: I've  
 been

Hirpling it, barefoot—ay, kind lady, barefoot.  
 You'd hardly care to be in my shoes, Judith?  
 While you've been sitting doose . . .

JUDITH: I've known the road:  
 I've trudged it, too, lad: and your feet are bleeding.  
 I'll bathe them for you, Jim, before you go:  
 And you shall have a pair of Michael's boots.

JIM: So, I may have young master's cast-off boots,  
 Since he's stepped into my shoes—a fair swap!  
 And tug my forelock, like a lousy tinker;  
 And whine God bless the master of this house,  
 Likewise the mistress, too . . . By gox, I've come  
 To charity—Jim Barrasford's come to mooch  
 For charity at Krindlesyke! Shanks's mare's  
 A sorry nag at best; and lets you down,

Sooner or later, for certain—the last straw,  
 When a man can't trust his feet, and his own legs  
 Give under him, in his need, and bring him down  
 A devasher in the ditch as the dogs are on him!  
 You're sorry? I don't know. How can I tell?  
 You're sly, you faggit; but don't get over Jim  
 With jookery-pawkry, Judith: I may be maiselt,  
 But I've a little rummelgumption left:  
 I still ken a bran from a brimmer—bless your heart!  
 It suits you to get rid of me; and you judge  
 It's cheaply done at the price of a pair of tackities.  
 Nay: I'll be taken here.

JUDITH: You cannot stay.

JIM: Do you take me for a cangling cadger, to  
 haggle . . .

Forgimety! I cannot . . . God's truth, I dare  
 not!

You've got me on the hop; and I must hirple;

But, if I go, I will not go alone:

I've a mind to have a partner for this polka.

JUDITH: Alone? And who do you think that . . .

JIM: Who  
 but you?

JUDITH: I!

JIM: If I've got to take the road again,  
 You've got to pad it with me: for I'm tired  
 Of travelling lonesome: I've a mind to have  
 My doxy with me. By crikes! I'm fleyed to face  
 The road again, alone. You'll come . . .

JUDITH: I cannot.  
 How could I leave . . .





You'll come to me. Just whicker like a peesweep  
 Three times, and I'll be with you in a jiffy.  
 We'll take the road together, bonnie lass ;  
 For we were always marrows, you and I.  
 If only that flirtigig, Phoebe, hadn't come  
 Between me and my senses, we'd have wed,  
 And settled down at Krindlesyke for life :  
 But now we've got to hoof it to the end.  
 My sang ! 'twill be a honeymoon for me,  
 After the rig I've run. But, hearken, Judith :  
 If you don't turn up by ten o'clock, I'll come  
 And batter on that door to wake the dead :  
 I'll make such a rumpus, such a Bob-'s-adying,  
 Would rouse you, if you were straked. I'll have you  
 with me,

If I've got to carry you, chested : sink my soul !  
 And for all I care, that luggish slubberdegullion  
 May lounder my hurdies ; and go to Hecklebarney !  
 I'm desperate, Judith . . . and I don't mind much . . .  
 But, you'll come, lass ?

JUDITH : I'll come.

JIM : Well, if you fail,  
 They'll take me here, as sure as death.

BELL (*stepping forward*) : That's so.

JIM (*wheeling round*) : The devil !

BELL : Nay : not yet : all  
 in good time.

But I question they'll wait till ten o'clock : they seemed  
 Impatient for your company, deuce kens why :  
 But then, what's one man's meat . . .

JIM : What's that you say ?



BELL: They seemed dead-set . . . You needn't jump like that :

I haven't got the bracelets in my pocket.

JIM: And who the hell are you? and what do you mean?

BELL: You've seen my face before.

JIM: Ay—ay . . .

I've seen it :

But I don't ken your name. You dog my heels :  
I've seen your face . . . I saw it on that night—  
'That night . . . and sink me, but I saw it last  
In the bar at Bellingham : your eyes were on me.  
Ay, and I've seen that phisgog many times :  
And it always brought ill-luck.

BELL: It hasn't served  
Its owner so much better : yet it's my fortune,  
Though I'm no peachy milkmaid. Ay : I fancied  
'Twas you they meant.

JIM: Who meant?

BELL: How should I  
know?

You should ken best who's after you, and what  
You're wanted for? They might be friends of  
yours,  
For all I ken : though I've never taken, myself,  
'To the little boy-blues. But, carties, I'd have fancied  
'Twould make your lugs burn—such a gillaber about  
you.

They talked.

JIM: Who talked?

BELL: Your friends.

JIM: Friends? I've no friends.

BELL: Well: they were none of mine. Last night I  
slept

'Neath Winter's Stob . . .

JIM: What's that to do with  
me?

BELL: I slept till midnight, when a clank of  
chains

Awakened me: and, looking up, I saw

A body on the gibbet . . .

JIM: A body, woman?

No man's hung there this hundred-year.

BELL: I saw

A tattered corpse against the haggling moon,

Above me black.

JIM: You didn't see the face?

BELL: I saw its face—before it disappeared,

And left the gibbet bare.

JIM: You kened the face?

BELL: I kened the face.

JIM: Whose face? . . .

BELL: Best not  
to ask.

JIM: O Christ!

BELL: But we were talking of your friends:

Quite anxious about you, they seemed.

JIM (*limping towards BELL HAGGARD with lifted arm*):

You cadger-quean!

You've set them on. I'll crack you over the cruntle—

You rummel-dusty . . . You muckhut . . . You  
windyhash!

I'll slit your weazen for you: I'll break your jaw—  
I'll stop your gob, if I've to do you in!

You'll not sleep under Winter's Stob to-night.

BELL (*regarding him, unmoved*): As well be hanged  
for a sheep as for a lamb?

JIM (*stopping short*): Hanged?

BELL: To be hanged by  
the neck till you are dead.

That bleaches you? But you'll look whiter yet,  
When you lie cold and stiffening, my pretty bleater.

JIM (*shrinking back*): You witch . . . You witch!  
You've got the evil eye.

Don't look at me like that . . . Come, let me go!

BELL: A witch? Ay, wise men always carry witch-  
bane

When they've to do with women. Witch, say you?

Eh, lad, but you've been walking widdershins:

You'd best turn deazil, crook your thumbs, my  
callant,

And gather cowgrass, if you'd break the spell,

And send the old witch skiting on her broomstick.

They said that you'd make tracks for Krindlesyke:

And they'd cop you here, for certain—dig you out

Like a badger from his earth. I left them talking.

JIM: Where, you hell-hag?

BELL: Ah, where? You'd  
like to learn?

It's well to keep a civil tongue with witches,

If you've no sliver of rowan in your pocket:

'Though it won't need any witch, my jackadandy,

To clap the clicking jimmies round your wrists.

To think I fashed myself to give you warning :  
 And this is all the thanks I get ! Well, well—  
 They'll soon be here. As I came up Bloodysyke . . .

JIM : Up Bloodysyke : and they were following ?  
 I'd best cut over Gallows Rigg. My God,  
 The hunt's afoot . . . But it may be a trap—  
 And you . . . And you . . .

BELL : Nay : but I'm no ratcatcher.  
 You'd best turn tail, before the terriers sight you.

*(As JIM bolts past her and through the open door)*

Rats ! Rats ! Good dog ! . . . And now we're rid  
 of vermin.

JUDITH : Oh, Bell, what has he done ? What has he  
 done ?

BELL : How should I ken ?

JUDITH : And yet you said . . .

BELL : I said ?

You've surely not forgotten Bell Haggard's tongue,  
 After the taste you had of it the last time ?

JUDITH : What did you hear ?

BELL : A drunken blether-  
 breeks

In a bar at Bellingham : and I recognized  
 Peter's own brother, too ; and guessed 'twas Jim :  
 And when they gossiped of Krindlesyke . . . Oh, I  
 ken

Ladies don't listen : but not being a lady  
 Whiles has advantages : and when he left  
 His crony sprawling, splurging in the gutter,  
 I followed him, full-pelt, hot on his heel,









This time, I hope—though you can never tell.  
 I hadn't ettled to darken the door again ;  
 Yet here I am : and even now the walls  
 Seem closing . . . It would be the queerest start  
 If, after all . . . But, dod, I've got the dismals,  
 And no mistake ! I'm in the dowie dumps—  
 Maundering and moonging like a spancelled cow :  
 It's over dour and dearn for me in this loaning  
 On a dowly day. Best pull myself together,  
 And put my best foot foremost before darkening :  
 And I've no mind to meet them in the road.  
 So long !

*(She goes out of the door and makes down the syke.)*

JUDITH : Good-bye ! If you'd only bide a while . . .  
 Come back ! You mustn't go like that . . . Bell,  
 Bell !

*(She breaks off, as BELL HAGGARD is already out of hearing, and stands watching her till she is out of sight ; then turns, closing the door, and sinks into a chair in an abstracted fashion. She takes up her knitting mechanically, but sits, motionless, brooding by the fire.)*

JUDITH : To think that Jim—and after all these  
 years . . .

And then, to come like that ! I wonder what . . .  
 I wish he hadn't gone without the boots.

*(She resumes her knitting, musing in silence, until she is roused by the click of the latch. The door opens, and BELL HAGGARD stumbles into*

*the room and sinks to the floor in a heap.  
Her brow is bleeding, and her dress, torn and  
dishevelled.)*

JUDITH (*starting up*): Bell! What has happened,  
woman? Are you hurt?

Oh, but your brow is bleeding!

BELL: I'd an inkling

There must be blood somewhere: I seemed to smell it.

JUDITH: But what has happened, Bell? Don't say  
'twas Jim!

BELL: Nay . . . nay . . . it wasn't Jim . . . I  
stumbled, Judith:

And, seemingly, I cracked my cruntle a bit—

It's Jill fell down, and cracked her crown, this  
journey.

I smelt the blood . . . but, it's not there, the pain . . .

It's in my side . . . I must have dunched my side

Against a stone in falling . . . I could fancy

A rib or so's gone smash.

JUDITH (*putting an arm about her and helping her to  
rise*): Come and lie down,

And I'll see what . . .

BELL: Nay: but I'll not lie down:

I'm not that bad . . . and, anyhow, I swore

I'd not lie down again at Krindlesyke.

If I lay down, the walls would close on me,

And scrunch the life out . . . But I'm hivering—

Craitching and craking like a doitered crone.

Lightheaded from the tumble . . . mother-wit's

Jirbled and jumbled . . . I came such a flam.

I'm not that bad . . . I say, I'll not lie down . . .

Just let me rest a moment by the hearth,  
Until . . .

(JUDITH leads her to a chair, fetches a basin of  
water and some linen, and bathes the wound  
on BELL's brow.)

JUDITH: I wish . . .

BELL: I'm better here. I'll soon  
Be fit again . . . Bell isn't done for, yet :  
She's a tough customer—she's always been  
A banging, bobberous bletherskite, has Bell—  
No fushenless, brashy, mim-mouthed mealy-face,  
Fratished and perished in the howl-o'-winter.  
No wind has ever blown too etherish,  
Too snell to fire her blood : she's always relished  
A gorly, gousty, blusterous day that sets  
Her body alow and birselling like a whinfire.  
But what a windyhash! My wit's wool-gathering ;  
And I'm waffling like a . . . But I'd best be stepping,  
Before he comes : I've far to travel to-night :  
And I'm not so young . . . And Michael mustn't find  
His tinker-mother, squatted by the hearth,  
Nursing a bloody head. But, mind you, Judith :  
I stumbled ; and I hurt my side in falling :  
Whatever they may say, you stick to that :  
Swear that I told you that upon my oath—  
So help me God, and all—my bible-oath.  
I'm better . . . already . . . I fancy . . . and I'll go  
Before . . . What was I saying? Well, old hob,  
I little ettled I'd look on you again.  
The times I've polished you, the elbow-grease  
I've wasted on you : but I never made

You shine like that . . . You're winking red eyes  
at me :

And well you may, to see . . . I little guessed  
You'd see me sitting . . . I've watched many fires  
Since last I sat beside this hearth—good fires :  
Coal, coke, and peat, but wood-fires in the main.  
There's naught like izles for dancing flames and singing :  
Birch kindles best, and has the liveliest flames :  
But elm just smoulders—it's the coffin-wood . . .  
Coffins? Who muttered coffins? Let's not talk  
Of coffins, Judith . . . Shut in a black box !  
They couldn't keep old Ezra in: the lid  
Flew off; and old granddaddy sat up, girning . . .  
They had to screw him down . . . And Solomon  
Slept with his fathers . . . I wonder he could sleep,  
After the razzle-dazzle . . . Concubines!  
'Twould take a pyramid to keep him down!  
And me . . . That tumble's cracked the bell . . .  
not stopt

The crazy clapper, seemingly . . . But, coffins—  
Let's talk no more of coffins: what have I  
To do with coffins? Let us talk of fires:  
I've always loved a fire: I'd set the world  
Alow for my delight, if it would burn.  
It's such a soggy, sodden world to-day,  
I'm duberous I could kindle it with an izle:  
It might just smoulder with muckle funeral-plumes  
Of smoke, like coffin-elder . . . And the blaze—  
The biggest flare-up ever I set eyes on,  
It was a kind of funeral, you might say—  
A fiery, flaming, roaring funeral,



A funeral such as I . . . but no such luck  
 For me in this world—likely, in the next!  
 And anyway, it wouldn't be much fun,  
 If I couldn't watch it, myself . . . Ay, Long Nick  
 Salkeld,

And his old woman, Zillah, died together,  
 The selfsame day, within an hour or so.  
 'Twas on Spadeadam Waste we'd camped that time . . .  
 And kenning how they loved their caravan,  
 And how they'd hate to leave it, or be parted  
 From one another, even by a foot of earth,  
 We laid them out, together, side by side,  
 In the van, as they'd slept in it, night after night,  
 For hard on fifty-year. We took naught out,  
 And shifted naught: just burnished up the brasses,  
 Till they twinkled as Zillah'd kept them, while she  
 could . . .

And so, with not a coffin-board betwixt them,  
 At dead of night we fired the caravan . . .  
 The flames leapt up; and roaring to the stars,  
 As we stood round . . . The flames leapt up, and  
 roaring . . .

I hear them roaring now . . . the flames . . . I hear . . .  
 Flames roaring in my head . . . I hear . . . I hear . . .  
 And flying izles . . . falling sparks . . . I hear  
 Flames roaring . . . roaring . . . roaring . . .

*(She sways forward, but JUDITH catches her in her  
 arms.)*

Where am I? Judith, is that you?  
 How did I come here, honey? But, now I mind—  
 I fell . . . He must have hidden in the heather



To trip me up . . . He kicked me, as I lay—  
The harrygad!

JUDITH: Jim!

BELL: Nay! What am I saying?  
I stumbled, Judith: you must stick to that,  
Whatever they may say . . . I stumbled, Judith.  
Think what would happen if they strung Jim up;  
Should I . . . you can't hang any man alone . . .  
Think what would happen should I . . . Don't you see,  
We cannot let them string up Michael's uncle?  
Respectable . . . it wouldn't be respectable . . .  
And I . . . I sluted, fifteen . . . I'd an inkling  
There must be blood, somewhere . . . I thought I  
smelt it . . .

And it tastes salt on the lips . . . It's choking me . . .  
It's fire and salt and candle-light for me  
This time, and Whinny Muir and Brig-o'-Dread . . .  
I'm done for, Judith . . . It's all up with me . . .  
It's been a fine ploy, while it lasted . . .

JUDITH: Come . . .

BELL: Life with a smack in it: death with a tang . . .

JUDITH: I'll help you into bed.

(BELL HAGGARD gazes about her in a dazed  
fashion, as JUDITH raises her and supports  
her across the floor towards the inner room.)

BELL: Bed, did you say?  
Bed, it's not bedtime, is it? 'To bed, to bed,  
Says Sleepyhead: tarry awhile, says Slow:  
Put on the pot, says Greedygut . . . I swore  
I'd not lie down . . . You cannot dodge your luck:  
It had to be . . . And I must dree my weird.

When first I came to Krindlesyke, I felt  
 These walls . . . these walls . . . They're closing  
 on me now!

Let's sup before we go!

*(They pass into the other room, but BELL  
 HAGGARD'S voice still sounds through the  
 open door.)*

BELL : Nay! not that bed—  
 Eliza's bed! The old witch lay in wait  
 For me . . . and now she has me! Well, what  
 odds?

Jim called me witch: and the old spaewife and I  
 Should be the doose bedfellows, after all.  
 Early to bed and early to rise . . . I've never  
 Turned in, while I could wink an eye, before:  
 I've always sat late . . . And I'd sit it out  
 Now . . . But I'm dizzy . . . And that old witch,  
 Eliza—

I little guessed she'd play this cantrip on me:  
 But what a jest—Jerusalem, what a jest!  
 She must be chuckling, thinking how she's done me:  
 And I could laugh, if it wasn't for the pain . . .  
 It doesn't do to rattle broken ribs—  
 But I could die of laughing, split my sides,  
 If they weren't split already. Yet my clapper  
 Keeps wagging: and I'm my own passing-bell—  
 They knew, who named me . . . Talking to gain  
 time . . .

It's running out so quick . . . And mum's the word:  
 I mustn't rouse her . . . She sleeps couthily,  
 Free of the coil of cumber and trouble . . . I never

Looked on a lonelier face . . . The flames . . . the  
flames . . .

They're roaring to the stars . . . roaring . . . roar-  
ing . . .

The heather's all turned gold . . . and golden  
showers—

Izles and flying embers and falling stars . . .

Great flakes of fire . . . They've set the world  
alow . . .

It's all about me . . . blood-red in my eyes . . .

I'm burning . . . What have I to do with worms !

Burning . . . burning . . . burning . . .

*(Her voice sinks to a low moaning, which goes on for some time, then stops abruptly. After a while, JUDITH comes into the living-room, fills a basin of water from a bucket, and carries it into the other room. She returns with BELL's orange-coloured kerchief, which she throws on the fire, where it burns to a grey wisp. She then takes a nightdress and a white mitch from a drawer in the dresser, and carries them into the other room, where she stays for some time. The baby in the cradle wakens, and begins to whimper till JUDITH comes out, shutting the door behind her, and takes it in her arms.)*

JUDITH: Whisht, whisht, my canny hinny, my bonnie  
boy !

Your wee warm body's good to cuddle after . . .

Whisht, whisht ! *(Gazing in the fire.)*

First, Phœbe—and then, Bell . . . Oh, Jim !

*Steps are heard on the threshold, and MICHAEL and RUTH enter, carrying their sleeping sons, NICHOLAS, aged five, and RALPH, aged three. They put down the children on the settle by the hearth, where they sit, dazed and silent, sleepily rubbing their eyes.*

RUTH: Well, I'm not sorry to be home again :  
My arms are fairly broken.

MICHAEL: Ay: they're heavy.  
The hoggerel you lift up turns a sheep  
Before you set it down again. Well, Judith,  
You've had a quiet day of it, I warrant ?

JUDITH (*in a low voice*): Michael, your mother's  
here.

MICHAEL: My mother here ?

RUTH: I always fancied she'd turn up again,  
In spite of all her raivelling—Michael, you mind,  
About the mutch with frills, and all thon havers ?  
But where we are to put her I can't think :  
There's not a bed for her.

JUDITH: She's on my bed.

RUTH: Your bed? But you . . .

JUDITH: She's welcome to  
my bed,

As long as she has need. She'll not lie long,  
Before they lift her.

MICHAEL: Judith !

RUTH: She's not dead ?

JUDITH: Ay, son: she breathed her last an hour  
ago.

RUTH: So, after all, the poor old soul crept back  
To Krindlesyke to die.







## EPILOGUE

GHOSTS of my fathers, where you keep  
On ghostly hills your ghostly sheep,  
Should you a moment chance to turn  
The pages of this book to learn  
What trade your offspring's taken to,  
Because my exiled heart is true  
To your Northumbrian fells and you,  
Forgive me that my flocks and herds  
Are only barren bleating words.





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